THE WIDOW'S TRUST

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THE WIDOW'S TRUST.

"*This is my comfort in my affliction; for Thy Word hath quickened me.*" — PSALM cxix. 50.

THE

WIDOW'S TRUST.

BY

MRS. MARTHA TYLER GALE.

"Let thy widows trust in me." — JEREMIAH xlix. 11.

"And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and He said, Weep not." — ST. LUKE vii. 13.

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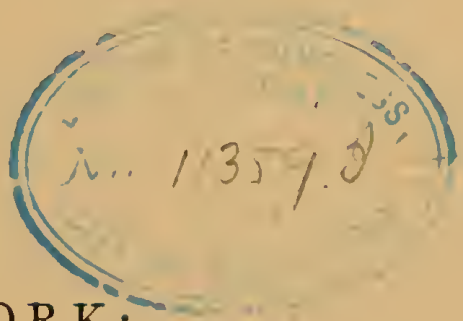

NEW YORK:
ROBERT CARTER AND BROTHERS,
530 BROADWAY.
1879.

[1878]

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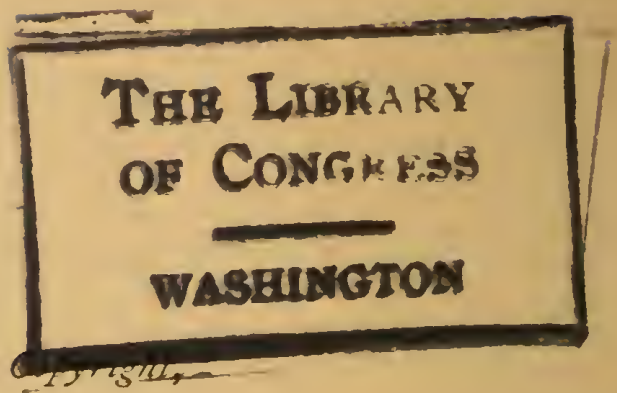

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1878.

Cambridge:
Press of John Wilson & Son.

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THE WIDOWED HEART.

"IS thine a widowed heart?
Each tie asunder torn;
Does one sad wish alone remain,
Swiftly to travel till thou gain
The parted spirit's bourne?
Would'st *thou* fain sleep
Where death doth keep
That slumbering form beloved, in delvèd chamber deep?

Poor, bleeding, widowed heart!
Man's words less heal than probe;
Not in man's pity canst thou find
Balm for thy wound or power to bind;
Still must it bleed and throb!
Friends pitying mourn,
Then sadly turn
To hide their fruitless tears, and looks that o'er thee yearn,

Alas! poor widowed heart,
What sorrows press on thee!
Each object that now meets thine eye,
Each hour that wearily goes by,
Remembrances will be
Of joys all fled,
And smiles that shed
Bliss o'er that rifled heart, where all but grief seems dead.

Poor, desolated heart!
If yet some joy remain,
If in thy lonely path so drear
One lingering, uncrushed flower appear,
To bid thee smile again,
Who now partakes
The smile it wakes,
Or, culling it for thee, of tenfold value makes?

Alas! poor widowed heart!
No signs thy grief express,
No human eye beholds thy tears;
No ear thy sob of anguish hears;
In utter loneliness!
Calm, nay serene,
Midst anguish keen,—
Thy deep, deep hidden wound by God alone is seen.

Alas! poor widowed heart!
The charms of infant glee,
Thy little ones' unconscious smiles,
Their prattled words and artless wiles
Wake only grief in thee.
The eye they blessed,
The lip they pressed,
On them no longer beams, nor smiles, nor is caressed.

Alas! poor widowed heart!
What now will be thy stay?
The staff so fondly leant upon,
Thy guide, thy counsellor is gone,
For ever torn away!
Each link unbound
Which clasped thee round,
No second self for thee, left all alone, is found.

For thee, poor widowed heart,
In vain sweet spring returns;
The charm of vernal songs and flowers,
The joys reviving Nature showers
Touch not the heart that mourns;
Or touch it so,
As wakes fresh woe
For one all darkly laid, this blooming earth below.

Yet still, poor widowed heart,
Though desolate and sad,
The thought, thy mourned one ne'er can know
Thine own unutterable woe,
Almost might make thee glad!
The Blest deplore
Earth's griefs no more;
And though thy joys are fled, thy loved one's tears are o'er.

Poor, broken, widowed heart,
To God disclose thy pain!
Earth yields no cure; but Heaven has given
A balm for hearts bereft and riven,
A balm ne'er tried in vain!
That volume bright,
Where beams of light
Illume the Eternal worlds, reveal it to thy sight."

CHARLOTTE ELLIOTT.

I.

DE PROFUNDIS.

"Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord!" PSALM cxxx. 1.

"All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me.

"Yet the Lord will command His loving-kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." — PSALM xlii. 7, 8.

"I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." — PSALM cxix. 75.

"The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him.

"For the Lord will not cast off for ever:

"But though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies." — LAMENTATIONS iii. 24, 31, 32.

DE PROFUNDIS.

I.

"THE face which, duly as the sun,
Rose up for me with life begun,
To mark all bright hours of the day
With hourly love, is dimmed away, —
And yet my days go on, go on.

II.

The tongue which, like a stream, could run
Smooth music from the roughest stone,
And every morning with "Good day"
Make each day good, is hushed away, —
And yet my days go on, go on.

III.

The heart which, like a staff, was one
For mine to lean and rest upon,
The strongest on the longest day
With steadfast love, is caught away, —
And yet my days go on, go on.

IV.

And cold before my summer's done,
And deaf in Nature's general tune,
And fallen too low for special fear,
And here, with hope no longer here,
While the tears drop, my days go on.

V.

The past rolls forward on the sun
And makes all night, O dreams begun
Not to be ended! Ended bliss,
And life that will not end in this!
My days go on, my days go on.

VI.

Breath freezes on my lips to moan;
As one alone, once not alone,
I sit and knock at Nature's door,
Heart bare, heart hungry, very poor,
Whose desolated days go on."

MRS. BROWNING.

I.

MARA.[1] I wish there were no such word as Widow in the language. I have been widowed for years; but the very name strikes the same dread over me as at first. I am still; for I know my sorrow comes from God; and though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him. I smother all my sobs and try to smile cheerfully on the happy ones, who have no conception of our sorrow; but with you, who know the grief of a desolate heart, I may speak without reserve. Only the heart that was pierced on Calvary knows the depth of our sorrow. As I said, the very name still cuts me like a knife.

Eirene.[2] I wonder you regard the name in that way. God uses it so tenderly, and so

[1] Ruth i. 20. [2] St. John xiv. 27.

frequently in His Word, speaking of widows, as well as the fatherless, as His peculiar care; protecting them by so many commands, comforting them by so many promises, and denouncing judgment upon those who wrong and oppress them. He has given a sort of sacredness to the name, calling Himself especially the widow's God, and the Father of the fatherless, and saying: "Let your widows trust in me." He really appears to take them into the tenderest relations to Himself. He says: "Thou shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more, for thy Maker is thy husband."

Mara. It is because He knows, as no other can, the heart of the widow, and understands that none need comfort so sadly. He singles us out, because we represent the most utter desolation and loneliness the heart can suffer. God's pity and care are measured, you know, by the measure of our grief.

Eirene. Is not the knowledge of this pity and care a comfort?

Mara. Yes, surely, it is a comfort; but it is not a cure.

Eirene. You do not let the balm sink down into the wound, or it would heal your broken heart: its virtue is omnipotent.

Mara. I apply it constantly, or I should despair; but the wound is so deep and sore! God intended it should be a rooted sorrow.

Eirene. Yes. He intended we should cherish a subdued, chastened spirit, but not continue to indulge such grief as you express.

Mara. I struggle against it, but do not yet overcome. When I think I am growing stronger, the sorrow rolls over me like a great wave, and overwhelms me, as some new reminder of my loss occurs, or some sense of need returns. At such times, I wake from troubled sleep, with a numb sense of pain, wondering at first why my heart is so sore. Often I am roused at the hour of thickest darkness, with a new shock of grief, as if some one had suddenly shouted in my ear: "Your son is drowned! Your husband has been killed."

Eirene. There were circumstances of peculiar aggravation in your case, and it is long before the shattered nerves recover from such a shock. It is your positive duty to divert your mind. Do you find no relief in travel?

Mara. Journeying *with him* was once a pleasure. Now it seems like aimless wandering. But I have travelled. We went abroad for a year, after breaking up. I think it helped me over the shock of leaving the old home. But have you any idea how many mourners seek relief in foreign travel? We met such numbers of American tourists in deep mourning. It seemed a sad procession of lonely women: childless mothers; daughters who had worn themselves out nursing aged parents; and widows, most desolate of all. One's sympathies were constantly drawn upon, and one sad confidence prepared the way for another. Then one is constantly reminded of the kind care, the considerate thoughtfulness, that once blessed us, the wisdom in which we trusted, the strength upon

which we used to lean, the love which never failed us. And when the time comes for returning — I used to think the best part of a journey was the coming home: now I have no home to return to!

Eirene. You, of all others, should not say that. Think how many poor widows are left utterly without a home. You have so many good homes!

Mara. Yes; but I know the sorrow of the homeless. Many homes are not *a home*, — not the one home with him who would have made a home for me in the midst of a Sahara desert or by the frozen Pole. I go from one place to another restlessly: I know not which is the most like home. I cannot settle down calm and restful in any of them. Even the dear old place would have been a constant reminder of his absence.

"Can I call that home where I anchor yet,
Though my good man has sailed?
Can I call that home where my nest was set,
Now all its hope hath failed!"

Eirene. Do you remember the new Beatitude some one has suggested, — "Blessed are the homesick, for they shall reach home at last"? We have lost our earthly habitation: let us look forward to the place which Christ has prepared for us in His Father's house. And we shall find our dear ones waiting for us in that heavenly home. You know Bishop Keble's verses: —

> "'Tis sweet, as year by year we lose
> Friends out of sight, in faith to muse
> How grows in Paradise our store."

Then you have other mercies to be grateful for. Your children are a blessing to you. Some widows are troubled with unruly and disobedient children, who have lost too early the restraining influence of a father. Others are left in poverty, and perhaps obliged to exchange ease and luxury for hard labor. You have a comfortable support, and no reason to fear for the future.

Mara. I am grateful; but widowhood is a grief which riches cannot alleviate, although

poverty may aggravate it. And yet I do not know but I have thought it may be a blessing sometimes *not to have leisure to grieve.* One trial may take off the mind from another.

Eirene. I suppose to each one of us our own grief seems the heaviest. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness." It seems almost a sacrilege to use the words, but the widowed heart often adopts them: "Is there any sorrow like unto my sorrow?"

Mara. Then the perplexities and cares of property are so trying. My husband saved me from all care. I am so helpless and troublesome. I feel mortified at my ignorance of business matters.

Eirene. Do you think the perplexities of poverty would be less trying, — the necessity of finding some way of earning a support, perhaps the uncertainty of needful food and raiment? Many poor widows suffer these perplexities; but *all* may find a refuge in the promises of the widow's God. The Lord is our Shepherd, we shall not want. You leaned

upon an arm of flesh, and it failed you: now "the Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Is not this better? Let us not be tear-blinded to our remaining mercies. What a comfort your children have been to you! How their characters have developed and strengthened under this trial! They have grown self-reliant and manly; and how tender and considerate for your comfort! We have lost some friendships that we rested in: tried by the touchstone of sorrow, they have proved unworthy; but others have been raised up, to comfort and sustain us. "A friend loveth at *all times*, and a brother is *born for adversity*." If they cannot stand this test, let them go: they are not worth regretting. Then how can we be sufficiently thankful for the love that was ours so long, — that so many years of our lives were blessed by husbands *worthy to be mourned?* Think of the dreary lives on which love never shone; of hearts forsaken and deceived by its false image; of the poor souls to whom

widowhood is a release from bondage, whose weeds are but a mockery! Would you exchange your grief for theirs? Ah, no! I hear you say: —

> "I hold it true, whate'er befall;
> I feel it when I sorrow most:
> 'Tis better to have loved and lost
> Than never to have loved at all."

And *the love is not lost.* We must never forget that. It waits for us behind the vail.

Mara. That brings me to another of our troubles, — perhaps I should call it a temptation. Have you not felt this intense longing for death, this utter weariness of life, —

> "Here, with love no longer here," —

And longed —

> "Only to lift the turf unmown
> From off the earth where it has grown,
> Some cubic space, and say, Behold,
> Creep in, poor heart, beneath that fold,
> Forgetting how the days go on"?

Eirene. It is a temptation as old as human nature. Job struggled with it: "Wherefore

is light given unto him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; which long for death, but it cometh not; . . . which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave?" "My soul chooseth . . death rather than my life. I loathe it; I would not live alway. O that Thou wouldest hide me in the grave!" But his faith triumphed: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: Thou wilt have a desire to the work of Thine hands." God give us grace to live.

Mara. Life is so hard! Death would be so easy!

Eirene. Try to think of it as something you can do for Christ. Pascal says, "We bear with life for the sake of Him who suffered both life and death for us." He was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Is there a drop of bitterness in life's cup which He did not taste?

"Who mourns
Or rules with Him, while days go on?

"Take from my head the thorn-wreath brown!
No mortal grief deserves that crown."

Mara. Did He suffer as we do, from the sickening dread of coming grief? Those who have never lost friends think it impossible their loved ones should die; but, the circle once broken, they hold their remaining treasures with fear and trembling, dreading lest they also be taken. In my crushed, helpless state, I am constantly fearing some new blow.

Eirene. Have you forgotten Gethsemane, and the cry, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me"? Submission means acceptance of future grief, as well as past and present.

Mara. But how can we be willing beforehand?

Eirene. Christ was. "If this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, Thy will be done." You remember the passage in Hebrews: "Who in the days of his flesh, when he

had offered up supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." Whatever it was, this mysterious cup, the strength desired was given. "We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and we have His promise: "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Let us trust in Him, and hush forebodings. What have we to do with a future we may not live to see? All that God requires of us is to live patiently, bravely, earnestly, to-day. And He promises the strength to do it. "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." But Christ bids us "take no thought for the morrow." "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." "Him trust with all sad memories and dim fears."

Mara. It is my desire and effort to do so. Though I have made such complaints, you must not infer that I do not resign myself entirely to the will of God, nor that I doubt

His love for me. I know "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."

I have myself given medicine to a darling child, weak and sick unto death, when it required such an effort for him to raise his head, or even open his lips to receive the nauseating draught, that it seemed cruel to rouse him from partial rest, and urge it upon him. It cut me to the heart to do it. Thus I regard God as my tender father, standing over his frail, sinful child, presenting this cup, and saying: I know your weakness and deathly faintness, I know how the thought of its lasting bitterness makes you shudder, and how you dread the sickness it causes; but I judge it best for you, I wish you to take it. So I submit; I acquiesce completely; I hold my breath, and brace myself, as did my dutiful child, to drink it without one murmur. I have no distrust of God's goodness, His wisdom, or His love for me, even me.

Eirene. If you are thus submissive, you will surely find relief.

"Who in God his hopes hath placed
Shall not life in pain outwaste."

God only chastens while we need the pain.

Mara. Do not say that all this is necessary for me! I do not seem to myself worth such an outlay of pain and discipline. Cannot our sufferings, in some mysterious way, benefit others, — as St. Paul speaks of "filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, for His body's sake, which is the church"? And you know the passage in the 1st Epistle of St. Peter: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."

It has seemed to me at times, that, weak as I am, I could even rejoice in affliction, if I could hope that, through it, some good might be accomplished for others. Do you remember that poem of Adelaide Procter's, — "Light and Shade"?

"Then I would have thee strive to see
That good and evil come to thee
As one of a great family.

The cry wrung from thy spirit's pain
May echo on some far-off plain,
And guide a wanderer home again.

Toil, yet rejoice; because no less
The failure that makes thy distress
May teach another full success.

It may be that, in some great need,
Thy poor life's fragments are decreed
To help build up a lofty deed.

It may be that, when all is light,
Deep set within that deep delight
Will be to know *why* all was right.

To hear life's perfect music rise,
And, while it floods the happy skies,
Thy feeble voice to recognize.

Then strive more gladly to fulfil
Thy little part. This darkness still
Is light to every loving will.

And trust, as if already plain,
How just thy share of loss and pain
Is for another's fuller gain."

Eirene. I am glad you stop there, without quoting the verses which always seemed to me to imply a Romish superstition: —

> "Then thou mayest take thy loneliest fears,
> The bitterest drops of all thy tears,
> The dreariest hours of all thy years,
>
> And, through thy anguish then outspread,
> May ask that God's great love would shed
> Blessings on some beloved head."

There is a great deal of vicarious suffering in the world. I do not know how much good it does, but it is inevitable. No one can do wrong, and suffer the consequences alone. The innocent suffer with the guilty, and for the guilty. How many wakeful nights and hours of agonizing prayer are suffered by mothers for their sons, sisters for their brothers, wives for their husbands! Such suffering may have no efficacy as merit, to take the place of punishment due to others, or to bring down blessings upon undeserving heads; but, if it makes us more importunate in prayer, more conscious of our utter dependence upon God,

stronger in faith, more cheerful in hope, and develops in us that love which beareth, believeth, hopeth, endureth all things, and *never faileth*, God may work through us, as instruments, the answer to our prayers. Or even if we pass away, and seem to see no answer, God *will not forget*. "The seed of the righteous shall be blessed." "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Probably Saint Paul referred chiefly to his spiritual anxieties and trials, as when he mentioned "that which cometh on me daily, the care of all the churches," as the culmination of his "weariness and painfulness;" and also his "great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart," when he could almost wish himself accursed from Christ for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh; and when he says, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you."

The partakers of Christ's sufferings mourn

with a divine compassion over the sins and punishments of men, as when Nehemiah and Daniel, like Christ, wept over the sad fate of Jerusalem. If we thus know "the fellowship of His sufferings, we shall also share His joy." "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, *as I have loved you.* Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." [1]

Such suffering for others is truly the bearing of another's burdens, by which we fulfil the law of Christ. But even the personal griefs of the believer draw him closer to Jesus, and bring him into deeper sympathy with His redeeming work.

Prayer avails most that is offered under pressure of some great burden, and we generally do most good after enduring keen sorrow of our own. A successful laborer remarked, "I have always had some great

[1] St. John xv. 11, 12, 13.

trial, as a preparation for accomplishing much good."

Every experience of sorrow and pain should enlarge our sympathy and fit us for greater usefulness. You remember how Mrs. Stowe speaks of sorrow as "the great birth agony of immortal powers; a searcher and revealer of hearts. Sorrow reveals forces in ourselves we never dreamed of. Who values the natures that cannot suffer? Sorrow is divine. The crown of all crowns has been a crown of thorns." She goes on to say: "There are victorious powers in our nature, which are all the while working for us, in our deepest pain. It is said that after the sufferings of the rack there ensued a period when the simple repose from torture produced a beatific trance. It was a reaction of nature, asserting the benignant intentions of the Creator. So after great mental conflicts and agonies must come a reaction, and the Divine Spirit coworking with our spirit seizes the favorable moment, and carries the soul to joys beyond the ordinary possibilities of humanity."

Mara. I know, every mother knows, it is so with physical pain ; but I have not experienced it in regard to mental anguish, though I have found a sweet peace in resignation. I do believe the strongest strength is that which endures. We honor the martyrs as much as the workers and preachers, — nay, more. And those were the noblest martyrs, who died in hidden dungeons, unseen and unpraised of men, known only to God. There are living martyrs now, walking cheerfully among men, enduring keenest suffering, because God wills it, with heroic patience and an acquiescence that is sublime. But — here is my doubt again — is it worth all this expenditure of pain ? Of what use is strength, when our lives are so nearly over, and our opportunities of doing good are so few ?

Eirene. Our opportunities are never gone while life lasts, and we never know when God may use us for our best and highest service. And do you not believe that we begin the new life of everlasting progression larger, wiser,

and nobler for our discipline here? We look too much at death as the end of life. It is only an incident in our existence. We must accustom ourselves to think of the Here and the Hereafter as the one kingdom of God. Why cannot we remember that we live in Eternity, and be patient? And "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Mara. I do not forget it. I have accepted sorrow as my lot. I often repeat to myself this stanza from Richter's "Prayer in Sickness:" —

> "Suffering is the work now sent,
> All my powers to this are bent.
> Suffering is my gain: I bow
> To my Heavenly Father's will,
> And receive it, hushed and still.
> Suffering is my worship now."

Eirene. I do not think *you* should repeat that yet. You are not shut up to suffering, by any means; nor is it the only work sent you. I believe, if you search for it, you will

find much more and better work than brooding over and indulging grief. I have just been reading of Paul and Silas, tortured in the inner prison, with their feet fast in the stocks. Surely they, if any, could say, "Suffering is my worship now." But they prayed, and sung praises to God, and the prisoners heard them; so that their praise became a blessed work for the good of others. Can we not exchange our dirges of lamentation for such outspoken praises of God's loving kindness and tender mercy as shall win others to Him?

If no work presents itself immediately, will you let me suggest something which has lately occupied my own thoughts, though as yet I have not found the leisure to carry it out?

Have you ever studied the Bible with particular reference to widows? I mean the *incidental* teachings, involved in the narratives of widows, in both the Old and New Testaments. These have seemed to me not only

full of comfort and instruction, but, taken in order, to portray the growth of Christian character, under the discipline of affliction.

You have leisure and a love for study. Would it not be a relief from your sorrow, and a way of doing good to others, if you were to try thus to lead them to the God of all comfort, through the lessons of His Word, as to His dealings with widows?

For He "comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

"FOR us, — whatever's undergone,
Thou knowest, willest what is done.
Grief may be joy misunderstood ;
Only the Good discerns the good.
I trust Thee while my days go on.

Whatever's lost, it first was won ;
We will not struggle nor impugn.
Perhaps the cup was broken here,
That Heaven's new wine might show more clear.
I praise Thee while my days go on.

I praise Thee while my days go on ;
I love Thee while my days go on :
Through dark and death, through fire and frost,
With emptied arms and treasure lost,
I thank Thee while my days go on.

And having in Thy life-depth thrown
Being and suffering (which are one),
As a child drops his pebble small
Down some deep well, and hears it fall,
Smiling, — so I : THY DAYS GO ON."

MRS. BROWNING.

"THY will be done! God of the desolate,
Teach me, with heart resigned and calm, to say,
Thy will be done! I know it was Thy hand
That gave; oh, may I see Thy hand
Reclaiming what it graciously bestowed!
Quiet my murmuring thoughts, still my regrets!
How little I deserved my happy lot
Should last so long! But life is now a void.
Void, did I say? Forgive me, Lord; for life
Is full of duties still, nor without joys.
Have I not still around me those to love,
And lead in holy paths? Are there no tears
On other cheeks, that I may wipe away?
I bear *his* name, and I may hear it blessed
By grateful lips. The memory of his kind,
Approving smile, will it not glad each hour
Of cheerful struggle against grief and sin?
Guard me, and help me on my journey home,
God of the widow and the fatherless!
May I forget my own, my bitter woes,
In pouring comfort into others' breasts;
Far from these lips be censure or complaint;
And let me strive, by every lawful means,
To hide the faults of others and my grief.
So by my gladsome looks and happy tones,

By sympathy in all the gentle joys
Of young and merry hearts, may it appear
How bright and sunny is the lot of those
Who have Thy love, a solace in their woes ;
Who, clinging to Thy cross, their souls to save,
Can look, without one shudder, towards the grave."

REV. W. CALVERT.
Hymns of the Ages.

II.

NAOMI,

THE HOMELESS WIDOW.

"In returning and rest shall ye be saved." — ISAIAH xxx. 15.

"For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer." — ISAIAH liv. 7, 8.

"BANISH far from me all I love,
The smile of friends, the old fireside;
And drive me to that home of homes,
The heart of Jesus crucified.

Take all the light away from earth,
Take all that men can love from me,
Let all I lean upon give way,
That I may lean on naught but Thee."

FABER.

II.

AMONG the trials incident to widowhood, perhaps none is felt more keenly than the breaking up of the home. In one sense, all widows are homeless: they stand alone in the world, missing the protection and love which have always shielded them; but when to this loss is added that of a long-accustomed and beloved place of residence; when one leaves the old, familiar haunts, and goes out among strangers, or even among friends, to find a new home, bereft of all that made home dearest; then, indeed, the widow feels herself desolate and forlorn.

Naomi seems peculiarly the type of the Homeless Widow.

She had left the home of her childhood, — that city in the hill country of Judea, where,

centuries later, the Ruler was to come to His kingdom, — and gone, with her husband and their two sons, to make a new home in the heathen country of Moab. There was a famine in the land of Israel, sent, as had been predicted by Moses, in punishment for the sins of the people. Doubtless, a want of faith was shown in thus endeavoring to escape it, and God's commands were forgotten, when the two sons of the family married the daughters of a heathen race.

But the new home seemed happy and prosperous. They continued there ten years. Elimelech died ; but the widow lived on with her two sons and their wives, both gentle and affectionate in their nature. Then, at the end of the ten years, " Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them ; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

" *Then* she arose with her daughters-in-law, that she might return from the country of Moab ; for she had heard . . . how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread."

There is no hope of sympathy, true friendship, and help for the needy, except among the people of the true God. In no pagan land was the command either given or obeyed, to leave the corners of the grain-field or the remnant of the vintage "for the stranger, the fatherless and the widow."

"Then she arose . . . that she might return." It is impossible to read this story without thinking of the parable of the Prodigal. "How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father."

Naomi is a widow, and childless. All her dependence has failed, — her "strong staff and beautiful rod." Bereft of love and of protection, she is alone and poor. She "begins to be in want," and her heart turns to its old home. She will go back to the people of God.

"Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up." And,

in returning, she does not go alone. God, in His tender mercy, provides human solace and companionship for us in our grief, as well as spiritual healing. "She went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah."

But she will not be selfish in her sorrow; she forgets herself for the moment, in her interest for these two daughters, beloved both for the sake of the dead and for their own.

"And Naomi said to her daughters" (perhaps when they had accompanied her as far as the Jordan, the boundary between Moab and Israel), "Go, return each to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept." With the free expression of grief common in all Eastern nations from the earliest times to the present, they uttered

loud wailings and lamentations. Perhaps they sat down together, in the dust, by the wayside, as one may see a company of mourning women in that country to-day, and wailed, "Alas! Alas!" while they recounted the virtues of the departed, and lamented their own desolate condition.

"And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." Both said this at first. Naomi remonstrates with them, after the simple fashion of the time. There was little provision for unmarried women or widows, in the rude customs of those days. To ensure "rest," *i.e.* safety, protection, care, a husband and a home were needful. Their best chance of obtaining these was in returning to their parents.

We see the unselfish sweetness of Naomi's character in her final words: "Nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much, *for your sakes*, that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me." She would not expose them to the difficulties and dangers which beset her

path; she would rather give up her last remaining comfort, sympathetic companionship, than see them suffer with her. For her, life seems nearly over; they are young, let them be happy again, if God will. While they would say, We could bear it for ourselves, but our poor mother! How can she endure such desolation?

In this hour of parting, all the grief they have suffered rushes back upon them. They renew their lamentations. This is Naomi's hour of bitterness. She is in the valley of the shadow of death.

It is said that in every Gethsemane there is a ministering angel, and Naomi finds a strengthening comforter in her daughter Ruth.

"Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her." Orpah goes back to appeal to the charity of her parents; returning, as so many young widows have done, in poverty, to the home they forsook willingly, in the joy of their bridal. Of her we hear no more;

but we fear that, like other heathen nations, the Moabites gave little consideration or tenderness to widows. Her mother's prayers followed her: "The Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me." Left alone with Ruth, Naomi makes one more effort to discharge what seems her duty. "Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law.

"And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

Naomi's name expressed her character; but she must have been not only "pleasant" and lovely, but loving and wise, and have recommended her religion in her family, or she would not have made a convert in her

own house, and won her daughter to her belief in the true God. Perhaps she felt confidence in the love and piety of Ruth, and was only putting it to this final test. At any rate, she no longer resisted, nor refused the comfort and support which God had given her. "When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her. So they two went," in silence for the most part: one full of sad thoughts, yet lit up with a gleam of thankfulness; the other sustained by new hope and courage. She was "steadfastly minded:" in the margin, we read, "she strengthened herself." And she had laid hold on strength.

We see the key to these different decisions. Orpah returned to her people and her gods. Ruth said, "Thy God shall be my God." It was not that her affectionate nature made it easy to change her faith, but the new faith which gave strength to her affection.

Over the Jordan, past the fruitful region which surrounded the "City of Palm-trees,"

up the dreary defile, between white walls of limestone rock, reflecting the bright sunshine with a painful glare, the two women toiled on, — a weary way, a long day's journey, — until they reached Bethlehem. It would seem that the Moabites let them leave their country unattended, and without farewell; but, "when they were come to Bethlehem, all the city was moved about them," and among the people of God, they met with kindness and true sympathy.

"And they said, Is this Naomi?"

Poor, weary and faint with travel, bowed with the weight of sorrow, no wonder it was hard to recognize her!

"And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi [pleasant], call me Mara [bitter]; for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?"

She acknowledges the hand of the Lord in her troubles, but as yet she tastes only the bitterness of grief. She has not the unquestioning submission of Eli: "It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth to Him good;" nor the firm confidence of Job: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

But she is not rebellious. She could say with David: "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it;" and with Jeremiah: "Wherefore should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens."

"My heart did heave, and there came forth, 'O God!'
By that I knew that Thou wast in the grief,
To guide and govern it to my relief;
Making a sceptre of the rod:
Hadst Thou not had Thy part,
Sure the unruly sigh had broke my heart."[1]

[1] George Herbert.

Upon submission follows peace. God is better to Naomi than her fears. She has learned the lesson of affliction. "Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." [1]

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned." [2] It is only the dross which is burned away: the fine gold comes out purified.

We learn to pray, with the Psalmist: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and lead me in the right way, even in the way everlasting!"

Naomi is no longer a "homeless widow." Through her daughter, whom she had won to the true faith, she is supported in her poverty, and ere long is welcomed to a new home,

[1] Psalm lxvi. 12. [2] Isaiah xliii. 2.

where her old age is spent in comfort and happiness.

A beloved grandchild is given her, in place of the sons whom God had taken. The women said: "There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed." And, when they gave her the infant, they said: "Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age; for thy daughter-in-law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him."

To the Eastern mind, no stronger expression could be used to denote the preciousness of this beloved daughter.

How God blesses us in and through our afflictions! We suffer the consequences of our mistakes and the punishment of our sins; yet He over-rules them all for our good and His own glory. His very chastisements prove His love. "I know, O Lord, that Thy

judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me."

"Sorrow may endure for a night; but joy cometh in the morning."

"DARKER than night, life's shadows fall around us,
And like benighted men we miss our mark;
God hides Himself, and grace hath scarcely found us,
Ere death finds out his victims in the dark.

Onward we go; for still we hear them singing,
Come, weary souls! for Jesus bids you come!
And through the dark, its echoes sweetly ringing,
The music of the Gospel leads us home.

Far, far away, like bells at evening pealing,
The voice of Jesus sounds o'er land and sea;
And laden souls, by thousands meekly stealing,
Kind Shepherd! turn their weary steps to Thee.

Rest comes at length; though life be long and dreary,
The day must dawn, and darksome night be past;
All journeys end in welcomes to the weary,
And heaven, the heart's true home, will come at last."

FABER.

III.

RUTH.

THE WIDOW TURNING TO GOD IN AFFLICTION.

"Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, Thou art the Guide of my youth?" — JEREMIAH iii. 4.

"Hearken, O daughter, . . . and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house. So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him." — PSALM xlv. 10, 11.

"Return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." — ISAIAH xliv. 22.

"The redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away." — ISAIAH li. 11.

"I will trust in the covert of Thy wings."

"FATHER, beneath Thy sheltering wing
In sweet security we rest,
And fear no evil earth can bring,
In life, in death, supremely blest.

For life is good, whose tidal flow
The motions of Thy will obeys;
And death is good, that makes us know
The Love divine that all things sways.

And good it is to bear the cross,
And so Thy perfect peace to win;
And naught is ill, nor brings us loss,
Nor works us harm, but only sin.

Redeemed from this, we ask no more,
But trust the love that saves to guide:
The grace that yields so rich a store
Will grant us all we need beside."

III.

IN the hour of her deepest affliction, Ruth came to the decision to cast in her lot with the people of God. She would not return with Orpah to her heathen home. She knew too well the sad lot of a widow in a heathen land. But the quiet example of Naomi, her unselfish sweetness of character, her submissiveness in sorrow, perhaps also the example of her lost husband, led this young widow to the resolution: "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." "God washes the eyes with tears, that they may behold the land where tears shall come no more." He takes away our frail human supports, that we may find the everlasting arms about us; He lets us walk in darkness, that we may learn to cling to His guiding

hand; He deprives us of our dearest treasures, that we may find in Him our all; He breaks up our earthly homes, that our hearts may find their rest in Him.

In her new home,—perhaps some humble shelter granted by the kindness of friends, perhaps the old residence which Naomi and her family had forsaken, in going to Moab,—Ruth enters at once upon the duty of supporting her aged mother. It was in the beginning of barley-harvest when they came to Bethlehem. Barley was sown in the autumn, and was the first crop to ripen in the spring, not long after the time when the feast of the passover was celebrated. "And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter."

The Israelites had been forbidden to gather the gleanings of their harvest, or to go back after a sheaf forgotten in the field, or wholly to reap the corners of the field; they were not

to go over the boughs of the olive-tree a second time, or to glean the grapes after the vintage: it was to be left for the stranger, the fatherless and the widow, that the Lord might bless them in all the work of their hands. This beautiful provision was intended not only to teach them beneficence, but to be a constant reminder of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. They were forbidden to oppress the stranger. "For ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Ruth had a double claim: she was a stranger and a widow. So "she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz." This was a kinsman of Naomi's husband, Elimelech, who is described as "a mighty man of wealth." They belonged to a princely family in the tribe of Judah; but the wealth, as often happens, was unequally distributed: Boaz had an abundance, while Elimelech's widow was reduced to poverty.

It was a matter of pure chance, we should say, that Ruth, going out with other women to glean, should happen upon the field belonging to Boaz; for it does not seem to have occurred to Naomi to solicit aid from her rich kinsman. Is there such a thing as chance? "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."

The fields lay all about the hills, which were covered with the closely built, walled town. Bethlehem must have shone in whiteness then as now, built of the limestone which, under a thin layer of soil, forms all these Judean hills. These fields are separated from each other, not by hedges or fences as with us, but by a boundary of stones placed at some distance apart. To move these stones would not have been a difficult thing to do; but it was one of those forbidden under a curse. "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbor's land-mark." There were and are no dwellings among the fields, except for temporary shelter during the time of harvest

or vintage, near the threshing-floor or the wine-press. For safety from wild beasts or wilder men, the inhabitants gathered in towns or villages.

Boaz came down from Bethlehem, and passed with courteous greetings among his reapers. "The Lord be with thee," and "The Lord bless thee," were customary forms of salutation; and the Arab inhabitants of Palestine preserve similar expressions of pious courtesy.

Boaz sees a strange, sweet face among the gleaners, and asks, "Whose damsel is this?"

"And the servant that was set over the reapers answered, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab. And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves."

Her humble manner of soliciting permission has won the favor of this upper servant. Everybody in Bethlehem knows Ruth's story, and has sympathy with her; Boaz too, as

presently appears. "Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens. Have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn."

The drinking vessels of porous clay, which keep the water cool, are familiar to all who have travelled in the East. Probably the water was brought from Bethlehem; for there are few wells in the fields lying around, and the water in those is not always good; while there is no sweeter water in Palestine than that of the famous well in Bethlehem, the water for which David longed, — David's well they call it, to this day.

In surprise at his greeting, Ruth bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, "Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?"

"Boaz answered, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband; and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust."

The shadowing wings, protecting care, brooding love,—how often we meet this symbol of God's tenderness for His people! "How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings." "My soul trusteth in Thee; in the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast." "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice."

Troubles drive us to this refuge; then we find help, and rejoice in our trust.

"How safe, how calm, how satisfied
The soul that clings to thee!"

Ruth's grateful humility in acknowledging the kindness of Boaz increases his regard for her. He invites her to share the simple meal of the reapers, — "Eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar," and himself reaches her parched corn; and afterwards charges his reapers not to molest her, but to let her glean even among the sheaves, and to drop some of the handfuls on purpose for her, and rebuke her not. "So she gleaned until even, and beat out that she had gleaned; and it was about an ephah of barley." Up the stony, steep path to Bethlehem she toiled, bearing the welcome burden of her gleaning, — about a bushel of our measure, — and was met by congratulations from Naomi. "Where wroughtest thou? Blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee!"

Is this only Eastern courtesy, or a token of the sweetness of Naomi's nature, breathing blessings on one who had befriended her daugh-

ter, before she knew his name? The blessing is repeated with emphasis, when she learns that it is Boaz: "Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead." "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend forsake not." How tenderly we think of those who have been kind to our dead!

"And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin to us, one of our next kinsmen." The margin reads: "One that hath a right to redeem." By the law, the kinsman might redeem a possession sold by "a poor brother," or the brother himself, if he had been sold into servitude for debt. "The land shall not be sold for ever; for the land is mine, for ye are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land." Although "the Law made nothing perfect," it was a beautiful foreshadowing of the Gospel. In Job's words of confident belief, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," he appeals to the "Living Kinsman," of whom the earthly kins-

man is but a symbol. "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also himself likewise took part in the same," that He might redeem us from our bondage.

Boaz was a near kinsman. But he was a rich man, and Naomi was very poor. Perhaps she waited for him to make the first advances. There was a still nearer kinsman; possibly she knew the fact. If she had any plan in her mind, she was not premature in disclosing it.

Boaz was busy with his harvest. After the ripening of the barley would follow the rye and the wheat. He had invited Ruth to glean with his maidens until all the harvest was ended. This she repeats to her mother, and Naomi says: "It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field." It was well for the young widow that she could earn her bread in this safe, sheltered manner, exposed to no rudeness or unkindness. "So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean

unto the end of barley-harvest and of wheat-harvest ; and dwelt with her mother-in-law."

When the harvest was over, and the harvest feast was held, Naomi proposed her plan to Ruth : My daughter, "shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" With confidence in her judgment, Ruth replies, "All that thou sayest unto me I will do." Following her mother's advice, and the custom of the Jews with reference to widows, she appeals to Boaz for the protection of his name. "Spread thy skirt over thy handmaid ; for thou art a near kinsman," — "one that hath a right to redeem."

In his reply, Boaz expresses both respect and affection for Ruth. "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter ; for thou hast shewed more kindness at the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, fear not ; I will do to thee all that thou requirest : for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman."

He allows the justice of her claim ; but there is a nearer kinsman, who must first be consulted. "If he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I . . . as the Lord liveth."

The scene at the gate of the city, next day, gives us another curious glimpse of Eastern customs at that early age. Boaz sits down in the open space at the gate, the town-hall or court-room of those times ; and, when the kinsman of whom he had spoken comes by, he calls him aside. He selects ten of the elders of the city, and lays the case before them, in accordance with the law, as recorded in the book of Deuteronomy. When a man died without children, his brother, or nearest kinsman, was to marry the widow, and her first-born son was to succeed to the name and estate of the dead, "that his name be not put out of Israel."

The kinsman was ready to redeem the land that had belonged to Elimelech, but not to marry Ruth the Moabitess, lest he should mar his own inheritance. In accordance with

the custom prescribed, but already changed by omitting the humiliating part (Deuteronomy xxv. 7–10), he draws off his shoe, and gives it to his neighbor, saying to Boaz, "Buy it for thee."

"And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day."

"And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses," and added blessings and congratulations.

This would seem to be the civil ceremony of marriage. What religious services, if any, were added at that early day, we know not. "Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife."

Her first-born son was given to Naomi, as her peculiar property, for a "kinsman," whose name should be "famous in Israel," for "a restorer of her life, and a nourisher of her old age."

Thus Ruth the Moabitess became the ancestress of David the King, and of David's greater Son.

To the stranger who "joined himself to the Lord," to keep His Sabbaths and take hold of His covenant, was promised "a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters." "I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the stranger that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants; . . . even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer, their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people."[1] The Jews received constant lessons that they

[1] Isaiah lvi. 3–7.

were not the exclusive people of God, but that, "in every nation, he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him."

In the genealogy of Jesus Christ are mentioned four women: first, Tamar, who was a Canaanite; then, Rahab of Jericho, the wife of Salmon and mother of Boaz; Ruth the Moabitess; and she that had been the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and probably herself a Hittite. The Messiah expected by the Jews was to be the Redeemer of the world. "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold."

Of most of the ancestors of Christ, we have the history more or less fully recorded in the Old Testament. None of their errors or sins are concealed. Kings, good and evil, are in the line: Ahaz, Manasseh, Amon, as well as Asa, Jehosaphat, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah. Does this not teach us that He took upon Himself our human nature, with its inheritance of weakness and susceptibility to temptation, — "In all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin"? And as He conquered, so we, through His Spirit, may conquer.

When we see the sweetness of true womanhood in Ruth, simple, tender, submissive, yet cheerful and energetic, in all her history as daughter, wife, and mother; when we think of her unselfish devotion, her sweet humility, not hesitating at the lowest service for the support of her mother and herself, — we are tempted to ask, What has been gained, in all these years of culture and development, in real beauty and strength of character?

We think of her in her new home, fulfilling larger duties and trusts with the same faithfulness and sweetness; like the "virtuous woman" of the Proverbs, "whose price is above rubies." She is "a crown to her husband," and his "heart doth safely trust in her." "She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life." "Her children arise up, and call her blessed."[1]

Sorrow is a test of character. Times of affliction are times of decision. God chastens us not for His pleasure, but for our profit:

[1] Prov. xii. 4; xxxi. 10, 11, 12, 28.

we are not the creatures of a blind chance, or the subjects of a capricious tyrant, but the children of a wise and loving Father. If we accept our chastisement at His hand, and submit to His will, sorrow shall work in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness. The submissive soul asks, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" And, when this point is reached, the soul meets its Saviour.

We have heard much about the worship of sorrow: "Sorrow is noble, sorrow is divine;" but sorrow in itself, unless accepted as coming from the hand of God, has not a tendency to elevate, but rather to harden and lower the character. It is an old saying, "The same fire that softens gold hardens clay;" and grief does not leave us where it finds us. An unsanctified affliction is a fearful thing.

To the widow, who in the hour of bitterest grief has begun to feel the need of support and consolation which nothing earthly can yield, let the example of Ruth speak.

Come, like her, and seek refuge under the

"shadowing wings." For your lost home, you shall find a new home among His people, and hearts filled with the tenderest love and sympathy. Do you, like Ruth, seek "rest"? Jesus says, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

Ruth found a kinsman, "one who had a right to redeem." Our Redeemer liveth. He has a double right to redeem: First, *the right of a kinsman.* "As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also himself likewise took part of the same." Secondly, He has *the right of purchase.* By the sacrifice of Himself, He has made eternal redemption for us. "I am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." "Return unto me; for I have redeemed thee."

Ruth sought the protection of Boaz in some uncertainty as to whether her claim would be acknowledged by him; but there is no uncertainty in coming to Christ. He never broke His promise, never failed the soul that trusted

Him. *We know* that "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Oh, yield yourself to this Redeemer! When you hear Him saying, "I have redeemed thee, thou art mine," hesitate not to claim Him in return as your Saviour. "Lord, I am Thine: save me!"

Ruth found a safe shelter, a happy home, — protection, love, and peace. What the soul finds in Christ, how can we begin to say?

"He is a path, if any be misled;
He is a robe, if any naked be;
If any chance to hunger, He is bread;
If any be a bondman, He is free;
If any be but weak, how strong is He!
To dead men life He is, to sick men health,
To blind men sight, and to the needy wealth:
A pleasure without loss, a treasure without stealth."

GILES FLETCHER.

"I am Christ's, and Christ is mine."

"LONG did I toil, and knew no earthly rest;
Far did I rove, and found no certain home;
At last I sought them in His sheltering breast
Who opes His arms, and bids the weary come.
With Him I found a home, a rest divine;
And I since then am His, and He is mine.

Yes, He is mine! and naught of earthly things,
Not all the charms of pleasure, wealth, or power,
The fame of heroes, or the pomp of kings,
Could tempt me to forego His love an hour.
Go, worthless world, I cry, with all that's thine!
Go! I my Saviour's am, and He is mine.

The good I have is from His stores supplied;
The ill is only what He deems the best;
He for my friend, I'm rich with naught beside,
And poor without Him, though of all possest.
Changes may come; I take or I resign:
Content while I am His, while He is mine.

Whate'er may change, in Him no change is seen
A glorious sun, that wanes not nor declines;
Above the clouds and storms He walks serene,
And sweetly on His people's darkness shines:

All may depart ; I fret not nor repine,
While I my Saviour's am, while He is mine.

He stays me falling, lifts me up when down,
Reclaims me wandering, guards from every foe,
Plants on my worthless brow the victor's crown,
Which, in return, before His feet I throw ;
Grieved that I cannot better grace His shrine,
Who deigns to own me His, as He is mine.

While here, alas! I know but half His love,
But half discern Him, and but half adore ;
But when I meet Him in the realms above,
I hope to love Him better, praise Him more ;
And feel, and tell, amid the choir divine,
How fully I am His, and He is mine."

HENRY FRANCIS LYTE.

IV.

THE WIDOW OF SAREPTA.

"The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him." — LAMENTATIONS iii. 24.

"Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy; to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine." — PSALM xxxiii. 18, 19.

"Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.

"The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth." — PSALM xli. 1, 2.

"And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you." — JOEL ii. 26.

"ELIJAH AT SAREPTA."

"LO, cast at random on the wild sea sand,
A child low wailing lies:
Around, with eye forlorn and feeble hand,
Scarce heeding its faint cries,
The widowed mother in the wilderness
Gathers dry boughs, their last sad meal to bless.

But who is this that comes with mantle rude
And vigil-wasted air?
Who to the famished cries, "Come, give me food,
I with thy child would share!"
She bounteous gives; but hard he seems of heart,
Who of such scanty store would crave a part.

Haply the child his little hand holds forth,
That all his own may be.
Nay, simple one, thy mother's faith is worth
Healing and life to thee.
That handful given, for years insures thee bread;
That drop of oil shall raise thee from the dead.

For in yon haggard form He begs unseen,
To whom for life we kneel :
One little cake He asks, with lowly mien,
Who blesses every meal.
Lavish for Him, ye poor, your children's store,
So shall your cruse for many a day run o'er."

KEBLE.

IV.

THE word of the Lord came to Elijah, in his hiding-place in the wild ravine of the Wady Cherith, near the Jordan, where the brook was dried up because there had been no rain in the land: "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee."

A rich widow, doubtless, we should say, pausing here, — into whose heart God has put compassion for His servant, for whom in all the land of Israel there is no safe resting-place from the pursuit of Ahab and Jezebel. Wait, and see.

Elijah obeys, traversing the land of Israel in safety to the city on the sea-shore, half way between Tyre and Sidon. One may see the ruins of it still, though the modern Sa-

repta, or Sarafend, is a little village on the hill, which rises abruptly from the beach, a little to the left. In the time of the crusades, the city was still upon the shore, and a chapel was erected over the reputed house of the widow.

Arrived at Zarephath, Elijah finds a woman near the gate, gathering sticks, probably drift-wood from wrecks, upon the sandy shore. He does not ask to be taken to her house, because God has sent him to be her guest; nor does he ask at first for food. Weary and thirsty after his long journey, he begs only for the cup of cold water which a child may give, but which in this time of drought and famine is a precious boon.

This widow has a generous disposition, or suffering has made her tender-hearted: she will not leave the stranger to linger by the wayside, athirst, while she can bring water; and the kindness of her heart is shown in the alacrity with which she starts to fetch it. As she was going, he calls to her, as if the

thought of his hunger had but just occurred to him, and bread was no more to ask than water: "Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand."

Her sad, sad answer shows the hopelessness with which she faces the horrors of death by starvation. For herself, she could bear it; but she has an only son, and how can she bear to see this evil come upon him!

"As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse; and behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

This widow is not an idolater, though living in a heathen land. No worshipper of Baal would have said, "As the Lord thy God liveth." Does she recognize Elijah as the stern prophet who had threatened Ahab with this sore drought and famine; or was it only from his rough garment and leathern girdle, the familiar garb of a prophet, that she knew him for an Israelite and a "man of God"?

"And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

"For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

Will she trust the prophet, and believe his strange promise, when so many of the chosen people of God have fallen into unbelief and idolatry?

"She went and did according to the saying of Elijah; and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord."

It has been said that this was the time of the widow's conversion; but it seems more probable that she was already a believer in the true God; that she had been, perhaps for a long time, a prayerful and trusting servant of the Lord, one of His hidden ones; else

would He have singled her out as the recipient of such a blessing? "I tell you of a truth," said Christ to the unbelieving people of Nazareth, "many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow." Like that other woman of "great faith," who followed the Master along these "coasts of Tyre and Sidon," who stood the severest test of her confidence in His power and love, this widow was one of His own. "*In every nation* he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him." Let us beware of making God's word narrow by our narrowness: "Is He the God of the Jews only? is He not also of the Gentiles?" "The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, besides those that are gathered unto him." [1]

[1] Isaiah lvi. 8.

Prompt obedience, showing faith in the promise of God, has been added to the kindness with which she received His messenger. She is becoming worthy to entertain an angel unawares, and to minister to one whom God's angels were sent to serve. She now enjoys, as do all who give to the Lord through His poor, the blessing both of giving and receiving at the same time. The more you draw from the fountain of love, the more love and joy — the inseparable companion of love — flow in to enrich the soul. It shall be "a well of water, springing up into everlasting life."

After the first great act of faith and self-denial, all becomes easy. She gladly prepares the second meal for the prophet, now that she has tasted and seen that the Lord is good,[1] and found that He is not slack concerning His promises.[2] She must daily have felt that, while others were pining in famine, she was living on the finest of the wheat; that her cup

[1] Psalm xxxiv. 8. [2] 2 Peter iii. 9.

was running over; that she was like those who were fed with manna, and ate angels' food. It seems also that her generous nature expands by giving. In her despair, she was about to bake a little cake for herself and her son, that they might eat once more, and die. Now, we read that she, and the prophet, and her house, did eat many days; or, as the margin has it, a full year. Her servants, or her relatives, or her poorer neighbors, are welcomed to a share of her abundance.

Except for the destitution caused by the famine, she was not in circumstances of abject poverty. She was the mistress of a household, and possessed one of the better class of dwellings. The word translated "loft" in our version, as the chamber of the prophet, is "alliyeh" in the Hebrew, still the common Arabic word for the pleasant upper room, or place of honor given to guests, in Eastern houses. The same word describes the "little chamber on the wall" (or roof), prepared for Elisha by the rich Shunamite. These pleas-

ant upper rooms, opening often through arched corridors upon the flat roofs of the houses, are more retired than the lower apartments, which are occupied by the women and servants of the family, and were appropriate for the resting-places of prophets.[1]

The stern prophet, then, was the honored guest of the widow during a year, and possibly two years, of famine.

"We learn from heathen records," says Dean Stanley, in his "History of the Jewish Church," "that this famine was long remembered in Phœnicia, and that solemn prayers were offered up, in the temples of Astarte, by Ethbaal, King of Tyre, for the descent of rain upon the earth." What a lesson for the heathen friends and neighbors of this widow was the life of faith and prayer and constant dependence upon the promises of God, which went on in her dwelling! Truly, it was a light shining in a dark place. What choice companionship had she secured, during

[1] The Land and the Book. Wm. M. Thomson, D.D.

these many months, when there was neither dew nor rain! The poor widow lives under the immediate care of the Almighty, Omniscient Father, and has come into daily communion with the Infinite Spirit. Let us then open our doors with generous faith and obedient service; let us "use hospitality without grudging"! Not only may we entertain angels unawares, — the King's servants, — but to the open heart the King Himself shall enter. "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." [1]

To him that hath shall be given. Having proved herself an apt learner in God's school, this widow is to receive another lesson. As her faith did not fail, nor her obedience waver, under this severe test, she is again to be sorrow-taught; for, poor widow though she be, she is to be one of the world's teachers to the end of time. The boy who has been so long miraculously sustained by God-given bread,

[1] Revelations iii. 20.

and whose life must have seemed precious in the sight of the Lord, to her great surprise and dismay, falls sick and dies.

Now, she is not only a widow, but childless; for the little one, who busied and cheered her lonely hours, can no longer prattle in her ear, and divert her from her gloom. When the cheerful voices are hushed, and the dear, familiar footsteps are heard no more, how terrible is the stillness!

"And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?"

When God comes especially near to the soul by His providences, an overwhelming sense of sin is often the result. "Depart from me," said Peter, in his astonishment at Christ's miracles; "for I am a sinful man, O Lord." The first thought, in great affliction, is that God is punishing us for something in the past. Naomi said, "The Lord hath testified against me." Even Job, though con-

scious of integrity, and stoutly defending his uprightness against the aspersions of his friends, confesses: "I have sinned; what shall I do unto Thee, O Thou preserver of men?"[1] "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."[2]

Those of us who have listened to Mendelssohn's Oratorio of Elijah remember the plaintive wail of the childless widow: "Help me, man of God! my son is sick! and his sickness is so sore that there is no breath left in him. I go mourning all the day long; I lie down and weep at night. See mine affliction! Be thou the orphan's helper!"

And he said, "Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom," — for she yet clung to the little lifeless form, — oh, how hard it is to let them go out of our arms into Death's! — "and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon

[1] Job vii. 20. [2] Ibid. xlii. 5, 6.

his own bed. And he cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee let this child's soul come into him again. And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth."

"And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth."

I know. Faith had become certainty.

"Rabbi, said Nicodemus, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him."

"We have heard him ourselves;" said the Samaritans, "and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

> "*I know*, is all the mourner saith,
> Knowledge by suffering entereth,
> And life is perfected by death."

Is it not worth while to suffer, to obtain such precious knowledge?

Of the subsequent life of this widow, we are told nothing; but it would seem that Elijah remained in her dwelling, until, "after many days," the word of the Lord came to him in the third year of the famine, saying, "Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth."

The rescued son of the widow is identified in very old Jewish traditions with the boy who was with Elijah on Mount Carmel, and was sent to watch for the little cloud which was the sign of the promised rain, and whom he left at Beersheba, when he went into the wilderness and to Mount Horeb; with the youth who was sent to anoint Jehu,[1] and with

[1] 2 Kings ix. 1.

the prophet Jonah, who is called by Dean Stanley "the first apostle, though involuntary and unconscious, of the Gentiles; repaying, in his mission of mercy and pity to the Assyrian Nineveh, the mercy and pity which his mother had shown to the Israelite wanderer."

If this tradition be well founded, we see the mother giving up to the service of God the child whose life He had redeemed from death. Like Hannah, she could say: "For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him: therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord." [1]

Beside the lesson, "The Lord will provide," usually drawn from the story of this widow, another is suggested: how much, under God's blessing, is often accomplished by people of very limited resources. There never was a great quantity of oil or meal, apparently, — a little in the cruse, a handful in the bottom

[1] 1 Sam. i. 27, 28.

of the barrel, — but the generous heart made it welcome to all, and there was enough for all: *it never failed.* Although so limited in appearance, this widow's resources were infinite. She drew upon Omnipotence.

Is not the lesson of this story, and that of the multiplication of the widow's oil, the same, to some extent, which we draw from the miracles of Christ in feeding the thousands? "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." "The silver and the gold are His." Why should we care to call any thing our own? Our Father has enough for all His children.

We pray, "Give us *this day* our daily bread;" and, if He takes us at our word, shall we begin to fret about to-morrow?

"My God shall supply all your need."

If He wishes us to give to others, He can furnish the means; if He has work for us to do, He can give us strength. "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

"IS thy cruse of comfort wasting? Rise, and share it with another,
And through all the years of famine it shall serve thee and thy brother.

Love Divine will fill thy storehouse, or thy handful still renew:
Scanty fare for one will often make a royal feast for two.

For the heart grows rich in giving; all its wealth is living grain;
Seeds, which mildew in the garner, scattered fill with gold the plain.

Is thy burden hard and heavy? do thy steps drag wearily?
Help to bear thy brother's burden, God will bear both it and thee.

Numb and weary on the mountains, wouldst thou sleep amidst the snow?
Chafe that frozen form beside thee, and together both shall glow.

Art thou stricken in life's battle? Many wounded
round thee moan:
Lavish on their wounds thy balsams, and that
balm shall heal thine own.

Is the heart a well left empty? None but God
its void can fill;
Nothing but a ceaseless Fountain can its ceaseless
longings still.

Is the heart a living power? Self-entwined, its
strength sinks low:
It can only live in loving, and by serving love
will grow."

MRS. CHARLES.

V.

THE WIDOW IN DEBT.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." — PSALM xlvi. 1.

"A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked."

"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." PSALM xxxvii. 16, 25.

"In the day when I cried Thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul."

"Though I walk in the midst of trouble Thou wilt revive me: Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and Thy right hand shall save me." PSALM cxxxviii. 3, 7.

"THE child leans on its parent's breast,
Leaves there its cares, and is at rest;
The bird sits singing by his nest,
And tells aloud
His trust in God, and so is blest
'Neath every cloud.

He has no store, he sows no seed,
Yet sings aloud, and doth not heed;
By flowing stream or grassy mead,
He sings to shame
Men, who forget, in fear of need,
A Father's name.

The heart that trusts for ever sings,
And feels as light as it had wings;
A well of peace within it springs:
Come good or ill,
Whate'er to-day, to-morrow brings,
It is His will."

ISAAC WILLIAMS.

V.

IN the history of the prophet Elisha, we find frequent reference to the "Sons of the Prophets."

There were many prophets during the reign of Ahab, who gained their living by assisting in idolatrous worship: "prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table;" but these had been slain by Elijah, at the brook Kishon.

It was God's vengeance, deserved by their own idolatry, and a just return for the cruelty of the wicked queen, who had cut off the prophets of the Lord.

At this time, the governor, or steward over the royal household, was a man who "feared the Lord greatly." As there were saints in

Cæsar's household, so the good Obadiah lived in that wicked court, and kept his integrity. When Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, he took an hundred of them, and hid them by fifty, in a cave, and fed them with bread and water through that time of famine and peril. 'For I Thy servant fear the Lord from my youth," he had said to Elijah.

After the destruction of the prophets of Baal, these hidden ones seem to have emerged from their seclusion, and with others, among the "seven thousand" who had not bowed the knee to Baal, they formed a class known as the "Sons of the prophets." There was a company of them at Bethel, and another at Jericho, where, after the translation of Elijah, fifty strong men of them sought for three days to find his mortal remains. They were gathered together, perhaps, something like a band of pious monks in a convent, only that celibacy was not practised; and spent part of their time in receiving instructions from the older prophets among them, and thus fit-

ting themselves to become teachers of the people.

After the translation of Elijah, his mantle rested upon his servant Elisha, whom God had appointed to be prophet in his stead. Evidences of God's presence with him were not wanting; miracles were wrought in answer to his prayers. After a short residence in Jericho, — when he healed the waters of the spring, still known as the "Fountain of Elisha," — he went up to Bethel, and from thence to Mount Carmel, and Samaria, which appears to have been his usual residence.

"Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen."

Jewish traditions, both of the Rabbins and the Chaldee paraphrast, followed by Josephus in his History of the Jews, represent this woman as the widow of Obadiah, and add

that he had contracted this debt through his generous support of the Lord's prophets, during the famine. If so, he may have lost his place in the household of Ahab, and have died in poverty, leaving no means for the payment of the debt.

If we reject this tradition, — as Obadiah is not called a prophet in our version, and we may think it improbable that one of that class should have occupied the post of steward in the household of Ahab, — the case is not materially altered. The widow of a good man, a faithful servant of God, is left in circumstances of great distress, under a heavy debt, which she has no means of paying. Perhaps her husband had incurred this debt imprudently ; perhaps, during those years of drought and famine, it was unavoidable, and, if his life had been spared, it would have been honorably discharged. A sudden death often leaves the affairs, even of those in good circumstances, in a sadly involved condition ; and hasty settlements, compelled by impatient

creditors, prove a source of great trial, if not of actual injustice, to the widow and fatherless. The exacting creditor had come to this poor woman, with the cruel demand that she should give up her two sons, more precious now in her widowhood, and upon whose labor she, perhaps, relied wholly for support, to be sold into slavery for seven years, that this debt might be paid. The law given by Moses allowed a man to be sold, or to sell himself, into service for seven years ; but all Hebrew bondmen were to be released in the year of Jubilee ; all debts were then discharged ; even purchased fields returned to their original owners. The servants thus secured were to be like ordinary hired servants. "Ye shall not rule over one another with rigor. . . . For unto me the children of Israel are servants, they are my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt : I the Lord your God." [1] The poor were to be relieved ; money was to be lent without usury; the

[1] Lev. xxv. 53, 55.

greatest freedom in giving was always to be shown: "Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy poor brother, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need." Even if the seventh year, the year of release, were at hand, "thou shalt surely give, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto." When a Hebrew servant went out free, in the seventh year, he was not to be sent away empty. "Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy wine-press; of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him." [1]

They were to be the servants of God, and a nation of brothers. The spirit of the Law was the spirit of the Gospel: Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfil. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself;" "For One is your

[1] Deut. xv. 8, 10, 13, 14.

Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren;" "Give to every man that asketh of thee;" "Do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again;" "Give, and it shall be given unto you."

What a power the Jewish Church would have been, among the heathen nations, if they had been faithful to the spirit of their Law, and retained the unity of a great family of brethren, under the Fatherhood of God!

What a power the Christian Church might be, if the spirit of the Gospel ruled in completeness!

But when the Jewish nation forsook the Lord and served Baalim, the duty of love and pity and beneficence to the poor was soon forgotten. They became a nation of oppressors and wrong-doers, "they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes;" they "despised the law of the Lord, and kept not His commandments;" they afflicted the just, they took bribes, and turned aside the poor in the gate from their right.[1]

[1] Amos ii. 6; v. 12.

In the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah,[1] and in the story of Nehemiah, we have accounts of the perversion of this custom ; and the parable of the unmerciful servant shows that the practice of selling debtors, with their wives and children, into bondage, was not an unusual thing in the time of Christ.[2]

It is noticeable that this distressed widow did not appeal to the pity of the worldly or the charity of the righteous : she went directly to God Himself, through His prophet.

She remembered the promise of the Lord : "Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry."

She took God at His word, and her faith was justified. The plan of relief is immediate. God shows her how to help herself. "And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee ? Tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house save a pot of oil. Then he said,

[1] Jer. xxxiv. 8, 18. [2] Neh. v. 1–9 ; Matt. xviii. 25.

Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full."

She is not to be idle. Having borrowed the empty vessels of her neighbors, whose curiosity is sure to be excited by this unusual proceeding, she is to shut herself in, with her children and her God. Those indifferent and perhaps unbelieving outsiders cannot know all that passes between her and her Divine Friend, nor in what strange ways He soothes and consoles her troubled spirit She is to employ all her remaining resources, to bring all her energies to bear; herself to lift and pour out the oil, and then God aids by His miraculous power. She pours out all she possesses, and there is a fresh supply, and that as long as she continues to drain the cruse. She fills every vessel which she had provided. "And it came to pass when the

vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed." Doubtless, she could have poured out more oil, if she had provided more vessels. She was not straitened in God, but in her own expectations and hopes.

It has been suggested that, had Abraham continued to pray for Sodom, had he pleaded, Wilt thou not save the city for the sake of *one* righteous? he might possibly have prevailed. His petitions were granted just as long as he continued them. So with us: we are afraid to ask great things for ourselves and others; therefore, we receive small things.

> "Thou art coming to a king:
> Large petitions thou shouldst bring."

"Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest."

There was more than enough to satisfy the creditor. Not only were the widow's sons

redeemed from bondage, but there was enough to support them all.

If she were indeed the widow of Obadiah, the bread which he had dispensed to the starving prophets of the Lord was richly returned to his own family.

"Bread shall be given him; and his waters shall be sure." [1]

"Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days."

The psalms of David must have been familiar to the sons of the prophets, and how full of promises to the afflicted, to the fatherless and the widow, to the "seed of the righteous"! How must this widow's heart have sung for joy! "I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him. O fear the Lord, ye his saints; for there is no want to them that fear Him. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open

[1] Isaiah xxxiii. 16; Ecclesiastes xi. 1.

unto their cry. The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The Lord redeemeth the soul of His servants; and none of them that trust in Him shall be desolate." [1]

It may seem strange to us that the widow of a good man should be suffered to come to such extremities. She pleaded with Elisha, "Thou knowest that Thy servant did fear the Lord;" and yet, notwithstanding his piety, she is reduced to this distress. It may have been to show her, *and to teach us*, more clearly, God's power and love for her, in her relief. God nowhere promises to keep His people from affliction: on the contrary, "*many* are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." [2] Their troubles shall not harm them. "There shall *no evil* happen to the just." And "They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." [3]

[1] Ps. xxxiv. 4, 8, 9, 15, 17, 22. [2] Ps. xxxiv. 19.
[3] Ps. xxxiv. 10.

"For the Lord is a sun and shield [a light in darkness, a defence in trouble]: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly."

Perhaps some poor widow may say, "My case is similar to this: my husband was a servant of God,"—perhaps a minister, who died suddenly and left her involved in debt, or long, wasting illness laid him aside from service, and his substance wasted with his life. "Can I expect miraculous assistance?" No: you cannot expect *miracles*, in the ordinary sense of the word; but you may expect *mercies*, and signal mercies, if your love and faith abound. Are you truly the Lord's, and do you commit all your interests to Him? As sure, then, as He is a covenant-keeping God and true to His word, He will sustain you, and make all things to work for your good.

He will give you power to work for the support of yourself and children, and open ways in which you can maintain them, if they

are young and dependent upon you; so that you need not be separated from them. This widow was not called to give up the society and the help of her sons. God provided not only for the payment of her debt, but for the support of herself and her children. People sometimes, from the kindest motives, seek to aid a poor widow by "relieving" (that is the word they use, but "depriving" would express it more truly) her of one or more of her children. There are exceptional cases; but it seems as if a widow ought never to be advised, far less compelled, to give up her children, unless she is manifestly unfit for their care. God has given them to her; they should be her best consolation in her widowhood; no one else can fill to them a mother's place. Let His people help them to remain together, help her to labor for their support. I know of cases where the efforts of a widow to bring up and educate a large family of children have been manifestly blessed of God, and her sacrifices richly rewarded.

If a widow is left helpless and dependent, too feeble to labor, and without natural supporters, God can raise up friends and helpers for her. Let her trust in Him, and despair not. "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water."

"They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them."[1]

"He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."[2]

[1] Isaiah xli. 17, 18; xlix. 10. [2] John vi. 35.

"LEAVE God to order all thy ways,
And hope in Him, whate'er betide,
Thou'lt find Him, in the evil days,
Thy all-sufficient strength and guide;
Who trusts in God's unchanging love
Builds on the rock that naught can move.

What can these anxious cares avail,
These never-ceasing moans and sighs?
What can it help us to bewail
Each painful moment as it flies?
Our cross and trials do but press
The heavier for our bitterness.

Only thy restless heart keep still,
And wait in cheerful hope; content
To take whate'er His gracious will,
His all-discerning love hath sent.
Doubt not our inmost wants are known
To Him who chose us for His own.

He knows when joyful hours are best,
He sends them as He sees it meet;
When thou hast borne the fiery test,
And art made free from all deceit,
He comes to thee, all unaware,
And makes thee own His loving care.

All are alike before His face,
'Tis easy to our God most high
To make the rich man poor and base,
To give the poor man wealth and joy.
True wonders still by Him are wrought
Who setteth up, and brings to nought.

Sing, pray, and swerve not from His ways,
But do thy own part faithfully;
Trust His rich promises of grace,
So shall they be fulfilled in thee.
God never yet forsook at need
The soul that trusted Him indeed."

Lyra Germanica.

NEUMARCK, 1653.

VI.

ANNA:

THE AGED WIDOW, WAITING FOR REDEMPTION.

"I have waited for Thy salvation, O God!" — GENESIS xlix. 18.

"O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth; and hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works.

"Now also, when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed Thy strength unto this generation, and Thy power unto every one that is to come." PSALM lxxi. 17, 18.

"Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.

"They shall still bring forth fruit in old age." — PSALM xcii. 13, 14.

"Even to hoar hairs will I carry you." — ISAIAH xlvi. 4.

THE HIDDEN LIFE.

"Your life is hid with Christ in God." — Col. iii. 3.

"OH! there are some who, while on earth they dwell,
And seem to differ little from the throng,
Already to the heavenly choir belong,
And even here the same sweet anthem swell;
They joy, at times, with 'joy unspeakable,'
Pouring to Him they love their heartfelt song;
While to behold Him 'face to face' they long,
As the parched traveller for the cooling well.
Ask you how such from others may be known?
Mark those whose look is calm, their brow serene,
Gentle their words, love breathing in each tone,
Scattering rich blessings all around, unseen.
They draw each hour, from living founts above,
The streams they pour around, of peace and joy and love."

Charlotte Elliott.

VI.

IT was no unusual occurrence, in the temple at Jerusalem, for a young mother to present her first-born son to the Lord, with the offering of a pair of doves, or two young pigeons, suitable to her humble station. But when Joseph and Mary brought in the child, Jesus, to do for Him after the custom of the law, an aged man, "just and devout," who waited for the consolation of Israel, and to whom it had been revealed that he should not die before he had seen the Lord's Anointed, came by the Spirit into the temple, and, taking the child in his arms, blessed God, and said, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."

While Joseph and Mary marvelled at the words of Simeon, and his prophecy of mingled joy and sorrow, an aged woman entered, "coming in that instant;" and she likewise "gave thanks unto the Lord, and spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." There were others present, doubtless, though their names are not recorded, who, like Simeon and Anna, were waiting and looking for the Redeemer, the Living Kinsman, the Consolation and the Hope of Israel. Like the faithful few, mentioned in the Book of Malachi, these waiting ones "spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name."[1] Coming into the temple, as their habit was at the hour of prayer, they found in the child Jesus the Lord's Christ.

Anna, the prophetess, was well known in the temple. So constant was her attendance

[1] Mal. iii. 16.

here, so faithful her observance of all religious services and duties, that it was said of her: "she departed not from the temple; but served God with fastings and prayers night and day." She was a widow of over eighty years, who, since the seven years of her early married life, had been so devoted to the service of God, that her home was in His house. Hers was the blessing that the Psalmist craved: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple." "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house; they will be still praising Thee." [1]

From their humble homes, where little opportunity for privacy could be enjoyed, these saints came up to the temple, with its Beautiful Gate and spacious courts, where three times in the day devout Jews gathered for prayer. "Evening, and morning, and at noon will I pray, and cry aloud; and He shall hear

[1] Psalm xxvii. 4; and lxxxiv. 4.

my voice."[1] Some, like the Pharisee, prayed, to be seen of men; others, like the Publican, prayed, "God, be merciful to me a sinner;" while others, like Simeon and Anna, found the home of their souls in the House of God, and the natural expression of their feelings in prayer and praise. If they "served God with fastings" also, we may be sure that it was such fasting as the prophet Isaiah commended: "to deal bread to the hungry, to undo heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free."

In her youth and middle life, Anna could serve God more actively. Now, in extreme age, there seems little left for her to do. Waiting in the temple, she has seen strong and active men die in the prime of life, and the midst of usefulness. Priests who offered sacrifices for the people, Levites who led the service of praise, have slipped away from her side, and have gone to their reward. Her children and grandchildren, it may be, have grown up, and no longer need her services.

[1] Psalm lv. 17.

Some of them, no doubt, have passed away before her: she feels it far better than to be here. Perhaps she wonders why her Father does not grant her desires, and come and receive her unto Himself; but she can wait. She would not venture to choose for herself; for she knows that God's time is the best time, that she has something still to do or suffer: and, instead of longing and praying that she may join the sainted dead, she fills up the time with most earnest supplication for the salvation of others and for the coming of the Messiah.

For not only among those waiting souls in the temple at Jerusalem, but throughout Palestine and the neighboring nations, even in the distant East, there was the expectation of the Ruler, the Prince, the Anointed of God, who should shortly appear for the deliverance of His people. They doubtless prayed, as do the blinded and desolate Jews in their wailing-place outside the old walls of the temple enclosure: —

"O Lord! in *our* day, in *our* day send Thy salvation!"

They prayed not in despair, but in hope; "*looking* for redemption."

Standing between the old world and the new, the night and the morning, they were the first to welcome the brightness of the dawn, and were permitted to share in the work of preparing the way before the feet of the Messiah.

Anna is not too aged to testify of Christ. Venerated as she is for her great age and long-tried piety, she can do much to lead others to faith in the Infant Redeemer. She must have been happy in her prayers, and in her testimony for Jesus. She could not have been lonely and sad, with such surroundings and such employments. After years of patient waiting on the Lord, she sees the fulfilment of His promises, and her last days are her best days. From the temple on earth she is translated to the temple in heaven; as one passing from one room to another of the Father's House.

"How beautiful," says one, "is the sight of

a pilgrim sitting by heaven's gate, looking up with longing eyes, — anxiously, prayerfully, yet patiently, — hoping each time the door opens it is for him!"

Waiting thus in the land of Beulah, as Anna waited in the temple; praying as she prayed, "Thy kingdom come!" — these aged saints are a link between earth and heaven; and when they pass into that upper temple, whence they shall go no more out, we behold the glory shining through the open door, and our hearts follow them with new faith and hope.

Such an aged widow I have in mind, who has recently been called to her heavenly home. She had spent a long life of piety as the beloved and honored wife of a faithful servant of God; she had brought up children for the Lord's service, and passed many a sleepless hour in prayer for their conversion; she had seen three of her sons pass away, not without hope in their death; she had ministered to the saints, and while health and strength lasted had diligently followed every good work; finally, her companion and guide

had fallen at her side, and she was left "a widow indeed, and desolate." In the years that remained, her feeble health confined her for much of the time to her own home, and, for the last four months, to her chamber.

It was always the "chamber of peace." Cheerful, patient, prayerful, she waited for her Lord's coming. And, at last, the door was opened, and she passed through, so quickly, so peacefully, that the waters of the dark river scarcely touched her feet.

Waking from slumber, with a smile, she said: "Why, I thought I was dreaming!" and in a moment she was beyond all earthly dreams.

Was it the faces of her beloved ones who had returned to meet her, or had her eyes beheld the King in His beauty?

"No shadow of death on thy pathway, no river in struggle to cross;
No anguish or trial of parting, no moment to picture a loss:
But, in one happy instant, the angel who carries the golden key
Hath unlocked the wonderful portals, and opened all heaven to thee!"

"Oh, soothe us, haunt us, night and day,
Ye gentle spirits far away,
With whom we shared the cup of grace,
Then parted: ye to Christ's embrace,
We to the lonesome world again;
Yet mindful of th' unearthly strain
Practised with you at Eden's door,
To be sung on, where angels soar,
With blended voices, evermore."

The example of Anna appeals especially to aged widows; but also to all who are laid aside by sickness or infirmity from the active employments of life, helpless, and dependent upon others. "Why am I left to linger here," asks such an one, "when I can do nothing more for Christ, and am only a burden upon my friends?"

If your work were done, God would take you home. Because you are left to linger, you may be sure He has still something for you to do. None are too old or feeble to speak of Jesus; to offer the sacrifice of prayer and praise; to set an example of patient cheerfulness in weakness and suffer-

ing. There is no witness for the truth of Christianity like the living example. In how many households is the presence of some patient sufferer — in her own sensitive estimate utterly useless, "the least of all saints" — a constant evangel of faith and hope!

Like the souls under the altar, slain for the Word of God and for His testimony, these, too, are witnesses for the truth; and they shall rest, and white robes shall be given them, when their mission is accomplished.

Perhaps God keeps you here *to pray for others*.

In the service of prayer, from which none are shut out, women have prevailed with God to gain even miraculous blessings. How can we know but that some obscure woman may yet accomplish wonders by her intercessions, may gain a Samuel for the Church, or preserve a Moses, or restore dead souls to life?

In a country parish, a revival of religion began, so quietly, so unexpectedly, that pastor and people were taken by surprise. "Who

has been praying for this revival?" asked the pastor, in his thoughts; and the question was answered, unconsciously, by one of his people, a near neighbor of a lame, helpless old man, who was mighty in prayer: "I knew there would be a revival; for I have heard Father C.'s earnest prayers, day after day."

A beautiful passage in Montalembert's "Monks of the West" describes the value, too little appreciated, of the Religious Houses as homes of unceasing prayer. Before these altars rose the pure incense of Christian worship, and intercessory prayer for those absorbed in worldly duties, for those in danger and temptation, for the ignorant and weak and helpless.

But the abolition of Religious Houses in so many countries has not ended the offering. From the Christian Church universal rises incessantly the incense of prayer.

The praying soul is never alone. Her confession is, "Lo, there are many with me!"

God turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends. So when we forget our own sorrows, and lose ourselves in intercession for others, we find ourselves lifted up in the spirit into the great family of believers, the cloud of witnesses, the general assembly and church of the first-born, enrolled in heaven. "Part of the host have crossed the flood;" but does it matter so much on which side of the "narrow stream" we are resting? "To die is gain," but "to live is Christ."

It is good that we should "both hope and *quietly wait* for the salvation of God."

"SOMETIMES I long for promised bliss;
But it will not come too late, —
And the songs of patient spirits rise
From the place wherein I wait;
While in the faith that makes no haste
My soul has time to see
A kneeling host of Thy redeemed,
In fellowship with me.

There is a multitude around,
Responsive to my prayer;
I hear the voice of my desire
Resounding everywhere.
But the earnest of eternal joy
In every prayer I trace;
I see the glory of the Lord
On every chastened face.

How oft, in still communion known,
These spirits have been sent
To share the travail of my soul,
Or show me what it meant!
And I long to do some work of love,
No spoiling hand could touch,
For the poor and suffering of Thy flock
Who comfort me so much.

But the yearning thought is mingled now
With the thankful song I sing;
For Thy people know the secret source
Of every precious thing.
The heart that ministers for Thee
In Thy own work will rest;
And the subject spirit of a child
Can serve Thy children best.

Mine be the reverent, listening love,
That waits all day on Thee,
With the service of a watchful heart,
Which no one else can see, —
The faith that in a hidden way,
No other eye may know,
Finds all its daily work prepared,
And loves to have it so.

My heart is resting, O my God,
My heart is in Thy care, —
I hear the voice of joy and health
Resounding everywhere.
'Thou art my portion,' saith my soul,
Ten thousand voices say,
And the music of their glad Amen
Will never die away."

MISS WARING.

VII.

THE WIDOW AGAIN BEREAVED.

"The Lord hath comforted His people, and will have mercy upon His afflicted." — ISAIAH xlix. 13.

"I, even I, am He that comforteth you." — ISAIAH li. 12.

"A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." — ISAIAH liii. 3.

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." — MATTHEW v. 4.

"He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted." — LUKE iv. 18.

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." REVELATIONS xxi. 4.

"'Tis sweet, O Lord, to know
Thy kindredness with woe!"

"THY compassionate 'Weep not!'
On this our tearful earth once heard,
For every age with comfort fraught,
Tells how Thy heart is ever stirred.

And, therefore, when Thy touch arrests
The bearers of that bier at Nain,
Warm on unnumbered hearts it rests,
Though yet their dead live not again."

MRS. CHARLES.

VII.

IN the early days of Christ's ministry, not long after the wonderful day of miracles at Capernaum, — when He had healed the centurion's servant, and the leper, and the mother of Peter's wife, and many who were vexed with evil spirits, and others who were sick, — He came with His disciples and a throng of interested and curious followers to "a city called Nain." As they approached the gate of the city, they were met by a funeral procession. "There was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and much people of the city was with her."

Nain was a small place, and the widow was well known, and had many friends who shared

her grief, and did what they could to show their sympathy; like those who came to mourn and weep with Martha and Mary, after the death of their brother. "And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not."

Her friends had mingled their unavailing tears with hers. Who is this stranger who dares to say, "Weep not"? Can he restore the dead to life? She lifts her tear-blinded eyes to the compassionate face of Jesus. He has touched the bier, and the bearers stand still. "And He said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.

"And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak; and He delivered him to his mother."

Absorbed in her sorrow at the illness and death of her only son, the widow of Nain may have heard of none of the miracles of healing: of the sick restored to health, of the lepers cleansed, of the little daughter of Jairus given back, from the gates of the grave, to her sorrowing parents. She may not even have

known that the Hope of Israel, the Desire of all nations, had yet appeared in the world. Certainly she had not faith which believed that this particular blessing was to be granted to her; for she does not appear to have asked for it, or to have even thought of calling upon Christ for aid. Probably her head was so bowed with grief, and her eyes so dimmed with tears, that she did not even notice His approach, until He spoke, and said to her, "Weep not."

Christ did not recount, with grateful appreciation, as in the case of others, the services she had rendered, or evidences of love and faith she had shown: as when He said, "This woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet;" and of another, "She hath anointed me for my burial;" nor did He praise her as He did the Syrophœnician, "O woman, great is thy faith;" or the poor widow, "Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all." No: this marvellous blessing seems to have

been bestowed upon the widow of Nain solely on account of her extreme distress, because she was a desolate widow, bereaved of her only son. "When the Lord saw her, He had *compassion* on her." He looked into the depths of her desolated, broken heart. He knew how fathomless was her love for this lost child; how she was in bitterness, as one is in bitterness for an only son.

She had reached the age when one most pines for love, companionship, and care. This son may have been quite devoted to her, and have given her undivided affection; for no wife appears in the procession. She may have depended upon him for support; he was the only human prop upon which she leaned, the comfort of her declining years. Now, bereft of all human support and comfort, she feels herself left alone, in a cold world, to go down to her grave uncared for. "If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

There may have been something peculiarly touching in her grief; but is not the sorrow

of every such widow enough to move a sympathetic heart? The tender Saviour could not look upon her, unmoved. With Him, to pity was to relieve. She has met Christ, for the first time, as have so many others, at a burial, or beside a tomb. He has shown Himself her friend; He can wipe all tears from her eyes. He did not address the crowd: He spake kind, comforting words to the stricken widow, bade her weep no more, and delivered the dead son alive to his mother.

Upon the people, who had seen this miracle, there fell a fear; "and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited His people."

We are told nothing more of Christ's visit to Nain; but surely, after such proof of His divine power, the people must have come to Him with all their troubles, bringing their sick to be healed. The wondrous story of Capernaum must have been repeated, and as then there was great joy in that city, so in Nain, "the blind see, the lame walk, the

lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached."

Of the joy in the home of the widow, who can speak? Must she not have opened her house, with her heart, to the Saviour, and counted herself thrice blessed, if allowed to minister to His need?

Stricken widow, crushed to the earth, and beaten down by the great storm of sorrow, do the clouds gather again in blackness, and break over your head? Has the son of your love, your pride and hope, your only remaining support and comfort, been removed from you? Or have the little clinging arms, whose tender touch about your neck so soothed your sorrow, been unloosed, and straightened for the grave, and are you left not only a widow, but childless? Do you say, —

"I do not pray: 'Comfort me! comfort me!'
For how should comfort be?
O, — O that cooing mouth, — that little white head!
No; but I pray, If it be not too late,
Open to me the gate,
That I may find my babe when I am dead.

Show me the path. I had forgotten Thee,
When I was happy and free,
Walking down here in the gladsome light o' the sun;
But now I come and mourn; O set my feet
In the road to Thy blest seat,
And for the rest, O God! Thy will be done." [1]

If grief has brought you to this mind, you are learning the lesson God has set you in the school of affliction.

"Till God shall make our very spirits poor,
We shall not up to highest wealth aspire."

It may be that in *no other way* than by taking from us our dearest treasures could He draw us to Himself.

As the Alpine shepherds lead the sheep to higher and sweeter pastures by taking the lambs there first, so our Good Shepherd gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them in His bosom, and thus allures us to heights we would never climb, if left to ourselves.

[1] Jean Ingelow.

"When on my ear your loss was knelled,
And tender sympathy upburst,
A little spring from memory welled,
Which once had quenched my bitter thirst.

And I was fain to bear to you
A portion of its mild relief,
That it might be a healing dew,
To steal some fever from your grief.

After our child's untroubled breath
Up to the Father took its way,
And on our home the shade of death
Like a long twilight haunting lay,

And friends came round, with us to weep
Her little spirit's swift remove,
The story of the Alpine sheep
Was told to us, by one we love.

They, in the valley's sheltering care,
Soon crop the meadow's tender prime;
And, when the sod grows brown and bare,
The shepherd strives to make them climb

To airy shelves of pasture green,
That hang along the mountain side,
Where grass and flowers together lean,
And down through mist the sunbeams slide.

But naught can tempt the timid things
The steep and rugged paths to try,
Though sweet the shepherd calls and sings,
And seared below the pastures lie,

Till in his arms their lambs he takes,
Along the dizzy verge to go ;
Then, heedless of the rifts and breaks,
They follow on, o'er rock and snow.

And in those pastures lifted fair,
More dewy soft than lowland mead,
The shepherd drops his tender care,
And sheep and lambs together feed.

This parable, by nature breathed,
Blew on me as the south wind free
O'er frozen brooks, that flow unsheathed
From icy thraldom to the sea.

A blissful vision, through the night,
Would all my happy senses sway,
Of the Good Shepherd, on the height,
Or climbing up the starry way,

Holding our little lamb asleep, —
While, like the murmur of the sea,
Sounded that voice along the deep,
Saying, Arise, and follow me."

MRS. LOWELL.

The tendency of selfish sorrow is to isolation; but grief borne with submission, and acceptance of God's chastening purpose, opens the heart to the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, and we are willing to suffer, — yes, we can even rejoice in tribulation, if through it we may learn to comfort others. "The God of all comfort . . . comforteth us in all our tribulation," not for our own peace merely, but "that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." [1]

> "Oh, be content to die, to be laid low,
> And to be bruised, and to be broken so,
> If thou upon God's altar mayest be bread,
> Life-giving food for souls a-hungerèd."

Very touching is the thought that Jesus did this miracle for the widow of Nain, not because of her faith, or her love, or in answer to prayer, or for any merit in herself, but simply because she was in sore distress. "He had compassion on her." Perhaps the thought

[1] 2 Cor. i. 4. [2] Trench, sonnet on "Tribulation."

of his own mother, probably already a widow, whose heart was shortly to be pierced by a more bitter grief, added to His tenderness for this stricken widow.

Let us come to Him, then, in our grief, not waiting for merit, for faith or love: our very sorrow is a claim upon His divine compassion.

One of the greatest attractions to the worship of Mary lies in her character of the sorrowing mother, through whose own soul the sword has pierced, full of sympathy for all sorrowful hearts longing for mother-love.

Oh, come rather to your compassionate Saviour! *He* was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." No merely human sympathy, were it even that of the mother of Jesus, — most blessed and most sorrowful of women, — can heal your broken heart.

We sometimes say of Jesus, How human was His compassion! Should we not rather

say, How divine! What human heart can so enter into the deepest sorrow of another? What *man* shall dare to say, Weep not! Can we restore the dead to life?

"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die."

Jesus "touched the bier." As He touched the blind eyes, and put His finger in the deaf ears; as He touched the leper and cleansed him, and took the ruler's daughter by the hand, saying, Maid, arise!—as He "took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses," so by His touch death has been changed from an enemy into a friend. "Women received their dead raised to life again." We dare not ask that our dead may be restored; yet we have God's promise that they shall be. They are with the risen Saviour, and they, too, shall rise. "Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming." "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

"And He came, and touched the bier."

"WHO says, The widow's heart must break,
The childless mother sink?
A kinder, truer voice I hear,
Which even beside that mournful bier,
Whence parents' eyes would hopeless shrink,

Bids weep no more. — O heart bereft,
How strange, to thee, that sound!
A widow o'er her only son,
Feeling more bitterly alone,
For friends that press officious round.

Yet is the voice of comfort heard,
For Christ hath touched the bier, —
The bearers wait with wondering eye,
The swelling bosom dares not sigh,
But all is still, 'twixt hope and fear.

Even such an awful, soothing calm
We sometimes see alight
O'er Christian mourners, while they wait
In silence, by some church-yard gate,
Their summons to the holy rite.

And such the tones of love, which break
The stillness of that hour,
Quelling th' embittered spirit's strife, —
"The Resurrection and the Life
Am I ; believe, and die no more."

Unchanged that voice, — and though not yet
The dead sit up and speak,
Answering its call ; we gladlier rest
Our darlings on earth's quiet breast,
And our hearts feel they must not break.

Far better they should sleep awhile
Within the church's shade,
Nor wake, until new heaven, new earth,
Meet for their new, immortal birth,
For their abiding-place be made,

Than wander back to life, and lean
On our frail love once more.
'T is sweet, as year by year we lose
Friends out of sight, in faith to muse
How grows in Paradise our store."

KEBLE.

VIII.

THE OPPRESSED WIDOW.

"I am oppressed; undertake for me." — ISAIAH xxxviii. 14.

"O Lord, Thou hast seen my wrong: judge Thou my cause." — LAMENTATIONS iii. 59.

"A Father of the fatherless and a Judge of the widows is God in His holy habitation." — PSALM lxviii. 5.

"The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee; for Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee." — PSALM ix. 9, 10.

"For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord." — PSALM xii. 5.

"MY spirit on Thy care,
Blest Saviour, I recline:
Thou wilt not leave me to despair,
For Thou art Love Divine.

In Thee I place my trust,
On Thee I calmly rest:
I know Thee good, I know Thee just,
And count Thy choice the best.

Whate'er events betide,
Thy will they all perform;
Safe in Thy breast my head I hide,
Nor fear the coming storm.

Let good or ill befall,
It must be good to me;
Secure of having Thee in all,
Of having all in Thee."

H. F. LYTE.

VIII.

WE have seen how the tender mercy of God was shown in the laws given to His chosen people, for the benefit of "the stranger, the fatherless and the widow." These three classes are nearly always mentioned in connection ; for by their very position of helplessness and deprivation they were more liable to suffer from poverty, and more exposed to neglect and oppression. They were not only to be remembered in the harvests and the vintage, and to have their share in the feasts of rejoicing, but those who perverted the judgment[1] of these helpless ones were to be accursed of God, and fearful woes were denounced upon oppressors. "Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If thou

[1] Deut. xxvii. 19.

afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry ; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword ; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless." [1]

Speaking of the unrighteous, Job says : "They drive away the ass of the fatherless, they take the widow's ox for a pledge. They turn the needy out of the way. They cause the naked to lodge without clothing." (Taking the widow's raiment in pledge was especially forbidden.) "He evil-entreateth the barren that beareth not, and doeth not good to the widow." Speaking of the "portion of a wicked man," he says, "his widows shall not weep." Eliphaz, looking upon the trials of Job as punishment for sin, accuses him, among other things, of having "sent widows away empty." Job defends himself, saying : "The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me ; and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." [2] "Did not I weep for him that was

[1] Exodus xxii. 22–24. [2] Job xxix. 13.

in trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor?"[1] "If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; (for from my youth he was brought up with me. . . . and I have guided her from my mother's womb)."[2]

The book of Job is supposed to have been written during (or after) the reign of Solomon. There was no period of more general prosperity in the history of the Jewish nation. In his wisdom and the justice of his judgments, and the general peace which prevailed during his reign, Solomon is regarded as a type of Christ; and some of the Messianic Psalms had their first fulfilment in him. "He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with judgment. He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor."[3]

[1] Job xxx. 25. [2] Job xxxi. 16, 18. [3] Psalm lxxii. 2, 4.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, we have the result of Solomon's mature experience, — the final conclusions of his ripest thought. "So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun; and beheld the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter."[1] "If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of . . . justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for He that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they."

In this general view of "the oppressions . . . done under the sun," Solomon may have had in mind the heathen nations with whom he was on terms of friendliness, and the Eastern provinces, governed then as now by nearly irresponsible tyrants, whose modes of government were seldom inquired into, when they returned satisfactory revenues. But in his own kingdom, reduced as it was under a

[1] Ecc. iv. 1; v. 8.

system of forced labor and taxation, there may have been great oppression and perverting of justice at the hands of subordinates. The people are not said to have complained with injustice to Rehoboam, "Thy father made our yoke grievous."

And, if such were the state of things under a wise and just king, what must it have been when an Ahab ruled in Israel, who set the example of oppression, or an Ahaz in Judah? The prophets do not leave us in the dark. "Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, . . . to turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless!" "Cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." [1]

Speaking of the sins committed in Jerusalem, for which God was about to burn His people like dross in a furnace, Ezekiel says:

[1] Isaiah x. 1, 2; i. 17.

"In thee have they set light by father and mother; in the midst of thee have they dealt by oppression with the stranger; in thee have they vexed the fatherless and the widow." [1]

"The word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother; and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.

"But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in His Spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts. Therefore it is come to pass, that as He cried, and they would not hear, so they cried, and I would

[1] Ezekiel xxii. 7.

not hear, saith the Lord of hosts; but I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not." [1]

When the coming of Christ is predicted in the last of the prophets, it is added: "But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner's fire." "And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness . . . against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts." [2]

He was to "proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn." [3] "For the needy shall not always be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever." [4] "With righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth; and He shall smite the earth

[1] Zec. vii. 8–14
[2] Mal. iii. 2, 5.
[3] Isaiah lxi. 2.
[4] Ps. ix. 18.

with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked." [1]

In His mission on earth, Christ claims the power of a judge, given Him of His Father; though He said also of Himself, "I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." [2]

The office of a judge is twofold: to give decisions, and pronounce condemnation. The Greek words, translated "judge" and "judgment," have this double sense.

The lessons of the captivity had been forgotten. Under the government of a Herod, we can imagine what injustice and oppression could prevail, unchecked. The religious leaders of the Jews were divided into Sadducees, who, believing in no future existence, had little restraint from wrong-doing; and Pharisees, of whose merely outward morality

[1] Isaiah xi. 4. [2] John xii. 47, 48.

and utter inward corruption, the scathing denunciations of Christ give terrible demonstration. One of his charges against them was that they devoured widows' houses. In His parables of the unmerciful servant, the unrighteous steward, and the unjust judge, He doubtless referred to a condition of things well known to His hearers. If the widow of this parable were not an actual existence, there must have been many such widows in Palestine, as in all other countries, since the world began.

"And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

"Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man.

"And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.

"And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God nor regard man, yet, because this

widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

"And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.

"And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." [1]

The same lesson is taught in the parable of the friend at midnight: [2] "Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet *because of his importunity* he will rise and give him as many as he needeth." We get the favors we earnestly seek from earthly friends, though their love be not sufficient to grant them speedily; and if this be so, and "if we, being evil, give good gifts unto our children," *how much more* will our Heavenly Father, out of His great love and compassion, supply our need, avenge us of our adversaries, and give us, all gifts in one, the gift of His Holy Spirit!

[1] Luke xviii. 1–8. [2] Luke xi. 8.

The unjust judge avenged the widow, lest he should be wearied by her continual appeals. The friend in the parable shrank from the slight trouble of rising at midnight to supply another's need.

But the widow's Judge, "the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary. . . . He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." And we may come at the darkest hour, at the very midnight of our despair, to our compassionate Friend and Saviour, without fear of repulse. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." He knows our grief; for "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted." He knows what it is to be "wounded in the house of" His "friends." Among His chosen disciples was one who was in the habit of defrauding Him. (Do not all who begin by defrauding Christ end by betraying Him?)

There has never been a period in the history

of the world when the poor and the needy have been free from oppression, when the widow and the fatherless have not been defrauded of their just dues. "Therefore His people return hither ; and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them." They ask, "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" "Doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?" Perhaps, in their distress, doubt goes deeper ; and they say, Is there "a God that judgeth in the earth?" They cry, with the Psalmist, "O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth, . . . shew Thyself. Lift up Thyself, Thou Judge of the earth : render a reward to the proud. Lord, how long shall the wicked . . . triumph? . . . They break in pieces Thy people, O Lord, and afflict Thine heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." But, with the Psalmist, our souls return unto their rest.

"He that planted the ear, shall He not hear?

He that formed the eye, shall He not see? . . . Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of Thy law; that Thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked. For the Lord will not cast off His people. neither will He forsake His inheritance. But judgment shall return unto righteousness; and all the upright in heart shall follow it. Who will rise up for me against the evil-doers? or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity? Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. When I said, My foot slippeth, Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up. In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul. Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with Thee, which frameth mischief by a law? They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood.

"But the Lord is my defence; and my God is the rock of my refuge. And He shall bring

upon them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; yea, the Lord our God shall cut them off."

This was Abraham's sheet-anchor: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And how many despairing souls have held by it since, through the storms of injustice, oppression, and doubt!

> "God's justice is a bed where we
> Our anxious hearts may lay,
> And, weary with ourselves, may sleep
> Our discontent away."

Perhaps there never has been a time when injustice and oppression seemed more rife than the present; when we can scarcely take up a newspaper without reading of some betrayal of trust, the stoppage of some bank where the savings of widows and orphans were invested, the failure of some Insurance Company to which they had trusted for support, when the husband and father was taken from them. In their desolation, these helpless ones see the "clouds return after the rain,"

and are crushed under stinging disappointments and bitter reverses. One resource after another fails them: one prop after another is removed. Poverty is hard enough to bear, when we can take it straight from the hand of God; but when we have the sore feeling of injustice to struggle with, the sense that we are defrauded, that we have not our rights, how much harder is it to be resigned, to accept this too as our Father's will! Hardest of all is it, when our wrongs come from those upon whose integrity and affection we relied, whom motives of gratitude should have moved to consideration for our helplessness.

From their ignorance of law and business transactions, widows become an easy prey to the extortioner and the fraudulent and perhaps more frequently than any other class fall victims. Single women, from stern necessity, learn to take care of themselves and their business affairs; but many widows are thrown upon the world like grown-up children, as ignorant,

and almost as helpless, as their babes. Happy are those who can in submission receive these trials as the will of God, and in confidence appeal to Him as their Judge.

If men yield to importunity, how much more shall God, in His fatherly love and pity, grant our requests! Plead His promises! Pray, and faint not! Be sure He hears. Our prayers are not always answered as we expect. God often delays in order to teach us precious lessons, which only these troubles could fit us to receive. He refuses what we ask, because He has some better thing in store, and means to bless us through these very afflictions, — our poverty, our losses, our sufferings at the hand of man.

As a tender mother refuses a child some hurtful toy, or is obliged to delay some wished-for pleasure, but meanwhile hushes the sobbing babe to rest on her bosom, so our Heavenly Father, if for wise reasons He cannot give what we want, "quiets us in Himself, without it."

"Ill that He blesses is our good,
And unblest good is ill;
And all is right that seems most wrong,
If it be His sweet will."

I know a widow who has been robbed of her all, and has no sure means of support. She does the little she can, and trusts confidently in God; and He supplies her needs, in strange, unlooked-for ways, sometimes by His own people, and sometimes by men who give no evidence of piety. She asks, "Do you think God will feed His birds, and starve His own babes?" She says, with confident joy, "*Happy* is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, which executeth judgment for the oppressed, which giveth food to the hungry." I have heard her quote whole pages of Scripture, — "God's own words to widows," she calls them: —

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee."

"Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt

thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."

"They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."

"Behold the fowls of the air: . . . your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"

"If God so clothe the grass of the field, . . . shall He not much more clothe you?"

"Your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

"My God shall supply all your need."

"Even to your old age I am He; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you."

Then there is the whole of the thirty-fourth Psalm, and the fifty-fourth chapter of Isaiah, and many more. Indeed, the Bible is full of consoling promises.

This widow had drawn "honey out of the Rock." Another said to me, "I have been placed in peculiarly trying circumstances ever since my husband died; but 'Prayer and Silence' has been my watchword. Prayer

and silence have carried me through every thing."

It may be asked, Should a widow not employ legal remedies against fraud and oppression? That question must be settled according to circumstances; but when we think of the slow, unsatisfactory nature of legal remedies, — the technicalities of the law often seeming made rather for the benefit of the guilty than of the innocent, — we feel like echoing St. Paul's advice to the Corinthians, when he urged them to settle their quarrels and grievances by an appeal to judges among themselves, rather than to drag them before heathen courts of justice. "Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" [1]

But we have been thinking of cases beyond the help of the law, where a widow can appeal only to her Divine Judge for redress.

"Dearly beloved," says the apostle again, "avenge not yourselves, but rather give

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 7.

place unto wrath ; for it is written, Vengeance is mine ; I will repay, saith the Lord."[1] And he urges the suffering saints in Rome to be "*patient* in tribulation ; *continuing instant in prayer*."[2] 'Tis the lesson of our parable, which he enforces again in the Epistle to the Ephesians :—

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto, with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

Do you remember Christian's effectual weapon, in his fight with Apollyon, "All prayer," which he used in connection with the "Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God"? In the Valley of Humiliation — when all these troubles befall us which tempt us to doubt God's love and care — as in the darker Valley of the Shadow, our only safety is in clinging to our Guide. He has been over every step of the way before us ; He is with

[1] Romans xii. 19. [2] Ibid. 12.

us, to uphold and comfort and protect us: let us fear no evil!

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

"He is our peace."

"LIFE'S mystery — deep, restless as the ocean —
Hath surged and wailed for ages to and fro;
Earth's generations watch its ceaseless motion,
As in and out its hollow moanings flow.
Shivering and yearning by that unknown sea,
Let my soul calm itself, O God! in Thee.

Life's sorrows, with inexorable power,
Sweep desolation o'er this mortal plain;
And human loves and hopes fly as the chaff
Borne by the whirlwind from the ripened grain,
Oh! when before that blast my hopes all flee,
Let my soul calm itself, O Christ! in Thee.

Between the mysteries of death and life
Thou standest, loving, guiding, not explaining;
We ask, and Thou art silent; yet we gaze,
And our charmed hearts forget their drear complaining.
No crushing fate, no stony destiny,
Thou 'Lamb that hath been slain!' we rest in Thee.

The many waves of thought, the mighty tides,
The ground-swell that rolls up from other lands,
From far-off worlds, from dim, eternal shores,
Whose echo dashes o'er life's wave-worn strands;
This vague, dark tumult of the inner sea
Grows calm, grows bright, O risen Lord! in Thee.

Thy piercèd hand guides the mysterious wheels,
Thy thorn-crowned brow now wears the crown of power;
And when the dark enigma presses sore,
Thy patient voice says, 'Watch with me one hour.'
As sinks the moaning river in the sea,
In silent peace, so sinks my soul in Thee."

MRS. STOWE.

IX.

THE CHARITABLE WIDOW.

"A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked." — PSALM xxxvii. 16.

"There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.

"The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." — PROVERBS xi. 24, 25.

"Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." — ACTS xx. 35.

"Freely ye have received, freely give." — MATTHEW x. 8.

THE WIDOW'S MITE.

"'TIS given from a scanty store,
And missed while it is given;
'Tis given, — for the claims of earth
Are less than those of heaven.

Few, save the poor, feel for the poor:
The rich know not how hard
It is to be of needful food
And needful rest debarred.

Their paths are paths of plenteousness,
They sleep on silk and down,
And never think how heavily
The weary head lies down.

They know not of the scanty meal,
With small, pale faces round;
No fire upon the cold, damp hearth,
When snow is on the ground.

They never by their window sit,
And see the gay pass by,
Yet take their weary work again,
Though with a mournful eye.

The rich, they give, — they miss it not:
A blessing cannot be
Like that which rests, thou widowed one,
Upon thy gift and thee."

L. E. LANDON.

IX.

DURING the very last week of Christ's ministry on earth, and probably on the last day of His teaching in the temple, the incident occurred which furnishes the subject of this chapter. "In the daytime He was teaching in the temple; and at night He went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives. And all the people came early in the morning to Him in the temple, for to hear Him."[1] On this Tuesday, He had been harassed by the attempts of the Pharisees and the Sadducees to catch Him in His words, and had afterwards addressed to the multitude and to His disciples those words of fearful warning and denunciation: "Woe unto you, scribes

[1] Luke xxi. 37, 38.

and Pharisees, hypocrites!" recorded in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew, predicting the terrible vengeance of God upon that generation, and ending with that outburst of divine compassion: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."

This was the last discourse of Christ in the temple. The incident of the Widow's Mite is not related in Matthew; but in both Mark and Luke it is told in immediate connection with this address to the Pharisees.

He said to the people, "Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the market-places, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and

the uppermost rooms at feasts: which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.

"And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury; and many that were rich cast in much."

The "treasury" was in the court of the women, between the inner court of the Jews and the outer court of the Gentiles, a place where Jesus was accustomed to teach; accessible to all, yet quieter and less public than the outer court, which He had just for the second time purified from its desecration by the money-changers and the sellers of merchandise. Here stood thirteen chests, or brazen vessels, broadening from the top downwards, (the word used denotes the form of a trumpet), into which the people cast their free-will offerings for the support of the temple worship. This offering must not be confounded with the "atonement offering"[1] of

[1] Exodus xxx. 12–16.

half a shekel, which every man, from twenty years old and upwards, was to pay yearly, — the rich no more, and the poor no less, — but owed its origin, perhaps, to the collection for the repairing of the temple in the time of Joash, when "at the king's commandment they made a chest, and set it without at the gate of the house of the Lord, . . . and all the princes and all the people rejoiced, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end." [1] The chest was emptied by the priests, and refilled by the people, until more than enough had been collected for the needful repairs ; and the silver and gold remaining were melted down, and made into vessels for the sanctuary.

As Jesus "looked up" from His seat near these chests, He saw the rich men casting "money" into them (the word used in Mark means a brass or copper coin, about the value of two English pence), "and many that were rich cast in much." "And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites,

[1] 2 Chronicles xxiv. 4–14.

which make a farthing." The coin mentioned was the smallest in use among the Jews.

"And He called unto Him His disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury; for all they did cast in of their abundance: but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."[1] The same word translated "want" in Mark is "penury" in Luke. It implies poverty, deficiency, narrowness of means, rather than absolute destitution. This widow was by no means a beggar or an object of charity, but one who, supporting herself by hard labor, could yet spare a portion, trifling in itself, but large to her, for a free-will offering to the Lord. In proportion to her means, she had given more than any one else; for they gave out of abundance, she out of her poverty, "all the living that she had." God had given her strength to work, and earn her bread, day by day; and she made this

[1] Mark xii. 41–44.

grateful acknowledgment of her love to Him. She certainly had no great anxiety for the future, or she would have saved those two mites "for a rainy day," instead of casting them into the treasury of the Lord.

Was she wanting in prudence?

She might have reasoned that, in her narrow circumstances, she was not required to give, it could not be expected of her. There were enough who had abundant means; the provision for the temple worship was always ample; God could take care of His house and His ministers; finally, that so small a sum as two mites could not matter either way, or that it was more important to her in her poverty.

In the simplicity of her love and faith, she acted on the true principle of beneficence: "according as the Lord thy God shall bless thee." She would no more dream of withholding the Lord's share of her scanty means, than the dues of those from whom she obtained her daily food. She had no right to lay it up for the future.

But He who says, "Give," says also, "Trust." "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, . . . and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."[1]

"What are you going to do when you are old?" I once asked of a clergyman, who had no way of laying up any thing for sickness or age. "I am going to accept just what God gives to me," he answered.

Beautiful spirit of trust! If we could all attain to it, we should not be worried either with present poverty or fears of future want.

This poor widow had doubtless come into the same complete acquiescence in all the appointments of God's providence for her: more than this, she was grateful that she had been able to earn this trifling sum with which to express her devotion to God. According

[1] Malachi iii. 10.

to the heavenly arithmetic and the balances of the sanctuary, the *grains of love* attached to two such mites are more valuable than rubies or pearls. God needs nothing from us. The silver and the gold are His already, and the cattle upon a thousand hills; He possesses all but our affections, and He condescends to sue for these. This poor widow had given her heart to the Lord; and, to manifest and prove this, she gave all she had.

The encomium pronounced was not *then* for her ear. She heard not the words of spoken praise; but we know she found a great joy in her self-forgetfulness, her perfect trust and entire consecration; and, though she left the temple empty-handed, she carried thence sweet peace in her soul.

This widow was a sister in spirit to Mary, who broke the alabaster box of precious ointment, and poured it on the head of Christ, and of her He would also say, "She hath done what she could." Love gives its all, whether the two mites, or the precious ointment

which "might have been sold for more than three hundred pence;" an extravagance no greater in proportion than the widow's offering.

Could this widow regret that she had but "two mites" for all her living, when, with eyes fully opened, she saw her Saviour's approving smile beaming upon her, and heard His voice saying, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord"? Can she regret it, now that she knows it was ordained that she, one of the lowliest and most unnoticed of women, should, by means of her deep poverty, and that humble offering, teach the world so many great and important lessons?

We know not all we may be doing in our humble lives. "It doth not yet appear" either what we shall be, or what we truly are. If we are "faithful in that which is least," through our love to Christ, our lowly work

and offerings are accepted of Him who declared that even "a cup of cold water" given in His name should not lose its reward.

Lovely example of giving to God's cause, for His service, and to sustain His worship!

May we never think that we are too poor to give, that God does not require it of us. Let us give as He has given unto us, of our abundance or of our deficiency; for He will accept the gift of love, as He did the widow's mites, which He caused to instruct and enrich the wide, wide world to the end of time.

The principle of these gifts to the treasury goes back to the free-will offering enjoined in the book of Deuteronomy (ch. xvi. 10, 16, 17). Three times in a year, — at the Passover, and the feasts of Weeks and of Tabernacles, — they were to appear before God, "with a tribute of a free-will offering, . . . according as the Lord thy God hath blessed thee." "They shall not appear before the Lord empty: every man shall give as he is able, according to the bless-

ing of the Lord thy God which He hath given thee."

When the tabernacle was to be set up in the wilderness for the service of God, the Lord said unto Moses, "Take ye from among you an offering unto the Lord: whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it. . . . And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the Lord's offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation, and for all His service, and for the holy garments. And they came, both men and women, as many as were willing-hearted, and brought bracelets, and ear-rings, and rings, and tablets, all jewels of gold, . . . blue and purple and scarlet and fine linen, and goats' hair, and red skins of rams, and badgers' skins," precious stones for the breast-plate, spices and oil for the light, and for the sweet incense, — "the children of Israel brought a willing offering unto the Lord." [1]

[1] Exodus xxxv. 4–29.

In the book of Joshua, we read: "All the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron are consecrated unto the Lord: they shall come into the treasury of the Lord."[1] Things taken in war were these, — spoils of the heathen, as the others were of the Egyptians.

When King David made preparations for the building of the temple, because he had set his affection to the house of God, and the princes and the people offered willingly, he blessed the Lord, who had given them grace to offer "with perfect heart." "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee."

These two elements are recognized by Saint Paul as the principle of Christian beneficence: to give "according as God hath blessed us," and "with a willing heart."

In place of the free-will offering to the temple service, the offerings of the early

[1] Joshua vi. 19.

Christians took the form of "ministering to the saints." But the same principle was to govern these contributions. They were to be systematic: "Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, *as God hath prospered him;*"[1] and given willingly: "For if there be first *a willing mind*, it is accepted according to that a man hath" (love), "and not according to that he hath not" (riches). "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, nor of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."[2]

How touching is his account of "the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia! how that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy, and their deep poverty, abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves; praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift,

[1] 1 Corinthians xvi. 2. [2] 2 Corinthians viii. 12; ix. 7.

and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." The secret of this unselfish devotion appears in the next verse: They "first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."

He urges the Corinthians to "abound in this grace also," "to prove the sincerity of their love. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich."

It was too late for the Corinthians to do as Mary did, and lavish their precious things on Jesus. (Blessed was Mary, whom love inspired to anoint Him *beforehand* for His burial! When the other women came afterward, with their spices, He was not there: He was risen.)

But Christ was present still, in the person of His poor, and in showing their love for Him by ministering unto these, they were sure of receiving the acknowledgment: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the

least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Surely, we do not feel enough the *blessed privilege* of giving! We regard it as a duty; and we cannot do more than our duty. When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants. Christ never meant that saying to make duty seem to us a dry, hard thing, or God an exacting master. He says expressly, "I call you not servants; . . . but I have called you friends." "Whatsoever ye do, do it *heartily*, as to the Lord." Make your gifts an offering of grateful love! Give to God, for His service and worship, to spread the knowledge of His name among the heathen, to promote His cause everywhere! Give to the poor, especially to the poor saints, as if you saw Christ present, sick and in prison, or needing food and raiment.

If you have little to give, God can bless that little. Great things are often accomplished by very limited resources. Those who have little money can often give their

time and influence for the Lord. None are too poor to give love and sympathy. The rich need the blessings and the sympathy and the prayers of the poor, as much as the poor need the beneficence of the rich.

As St. Paul told the Corinthians: "Your abundance may be a supply for their want, their abundance also may be a supply for your want: . . . as it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack." "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

"BRING thine all, thy choicest treasure,
Heap it high, and hide it deep:
Thou shalt win o'erflowing measure,
Thou shalt climb where skies are steep.
For as Heaven's true only light
Quickens all those forms so bright,
So, when bounty never faints,
Then the Lord is with His saints,
Mercy's sweet contagion spreading
Far and wide, from heart to heart,
From His wounds atonement shedding
On the blessed widow's part."

KEBLE.

"O LORD! how happy should we be,
If we could cast our care on Thee,
If we from self could rest;
And feel at heart that One above,
In perfect wisdom, perfect love,
Is working for the best!

How far from this our daily life!
Ever disturbed by anxious strife,
By sudden wild alarms;
Oh, could we but relinquish all
Our earthly props, and simply fall
On thy Almighty arms!

Could we but kneel and cast our load,
Even while we pray, upon our God ;
Then rise with lightened cheer,
Sure that the Father who is nigh
To still the famished raven's cry
Will hear, in that we fear.

We cannot trust Him as we should,
So chafes fallen Nature's restless mood
To cast its peace away ;
Yet birds and flowerets round us preach,
All, all the present evil teach
Sufficient for the day.

Lord, make these faithless hearts of ours
Such lessons learn from birds and flowers ;
Make them from self to cease ;
Leave all things to a Father's will,
And taste before Him, lying still,
Even in affliction, peace."

X.

MINISTERING WIDOWS.

"God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shewed towards His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." — HEBREWS vi. 10.

"We give thanks to God always for you all; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." — 1 THESSALONIANS i. 2, 3.

"For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." — MARK x. 45.

"My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work." — JOHN iv. 34.

"WHAT are we set on earth for? Say, to toil,
Nor seek to leave thy tending of the vines
For all the heat o' the day, till it declines,
And death's mild curfew shall from work assoil.
God did anoint thee with His odorous oil
To wrestle, not to reign; and He assigns
All thy tears over, like pure crystallines
For younger fellow-workers of the soil
To wear for amulets. So others shall
Take patience, labor, to their heart and hand,
From thy hand, and thy heart, and thy brave cheer,
And God's grace fructify through thee to all.
The least flower with a brimming cup may stand,
And share its dew-drop with another near."

MRS. BROWNING.

X.

THE earliest mention of widows in the Church is in the sixth chapter of Acts, where we are told, "There arose a murmuring of the Grecians [or Hellenist Jews] against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." This led to the appointment of deacons, or servants of the Church, who should give special attention to this work, and leave the apostles free for the ministry of the word and prayer. The "ministration" had been instituted soon after the Pentecostal outpouring, when "all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." "Neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as were

possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet ; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." [1]

There seem to have been many widows in the early Church. In their desolate state, they were naturally attracted to Christianity ; and probably not a few Christian women were made widows, in the persecutions which began so soon at Jerusalem, and which followed the Church everywhere, during the first centuries of its growth.

When Dorcas lay dead, and they brought Peter into the upper chamber, "all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them." Whether these were widows whom Dorcas had relieved, or whether there was already a band of widows, or deaconesses, in Joppa, of which Dorcas was a member, does not appear. We are not told

[1] Acts ii. 44, 45, and iv. 34, 35.

whether she was a virgin, a wife, or a widow: the name by which she is called signifies merely "a female disciple;" but she was certainly a typical deaconess, if not an actual one.

When Paul visited Philippi, he and Silas went on the Sabbath day to a place outside the city, "by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither."[1] One of these women is mentioned by name: Lydia, "whose heart the Lord opened," and who, "when she was baptized, and her household," constrained Paul and Silas to abide at her house; and they are doubtless alluded to in his Epistle to the Philippians, "I entreat thee . . . help those women which labored with me in the gospel."[1]

We hear of the Christian women at Rome, in the greetings sent by Saint Paul through Phœbe, "a servant of the Church at Cenchrea," literally "a deaconess." There was a "Mary,

[1] Acts xvi. 13, 14; and Philippians iv. 3.

who bestowed much labor upon" the apostle; "Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord;" and "the beloved Persis, which labored much in the Lord." "Julia" is saluted, and the sister of Nereus, and the aged mother of Rufus. "Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." Very tender must have been the apostle's affection for this aged saint. As he advised Timothy, he was himself accustomed to "entreat the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity." He must have had personal acquaintance, also, with Timothy's "grandmother Lois, and mother Eunice," whose "unfeigned faith" he holds in joyful remembrance.

Already an order of deaconesses seems to have been established in the Church, as must have been needful; for Eastern customs did not allow the deacons free access to the female portion of the community. It was their office, says Clement, "to assist in the distribution of alms, provide for the poor and sick, introduce

the Gospel, and assist the younger women with their counsel and encouragement." There was another order, of aged widows, of worthy character, and destitute of means of support, who seem to have formed a permanent charge upon the public funds of the Church. "Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work." [1] These qualifications imply a previous service as deaconess, either official or voluntary.

The widows began to be confounded with the female ministers, in the fourth century. A decree of the Emperor Theodosius, that deaconesses must be sixty years old, which sprang out of this misunderstanding, was abrogated by the synod of Chalcedon; and the requisite age fixed at forty years. This order

[1] 1 Timothy v. 9, 10.

was the prototype of all orders of widows or virgins, deaconesses and Sisters of Charity, Catholic or Protestant, which have since existed in the Church.

While the duty and privilege of Christian ministry appeal to all women who love the Lord Jesus, they seem especially appropriate to widows. If the pillars against which they leaned, and to which they clung, have broken and crumbled, how closely should they cling to Christ, how entirely live in Him and for Him! Should not their baptism of suffering consecrate them especially to their Master's service? If they have been long in the furnace of affliction, should they not come out "purified unto Himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good works"?

If they are laid aside from the employments of other women, as the care of a husband and household, and have no young children to require their constant attention, can they not hold themselves in readiness for the most delightful of all occupations, God's work?

Many solitary women and widows devote themselves unselfishly to their friends, — without considering whether those friends really need such service, — and think they are spending their lives in benevolent labor; but perhaps there are others to do this work. There are few to do Christ's work. While no duty to relatives and friends should on any account be neglected, on pretence of serving the Master, should we not ask ourselves whether, in fulfilling these duties, we are doing all we can for Him? Christ appreciates what you do for Him, far more than do earthly friends; He is more grateful, and His rewards are sweeter. His work is better than theirs, also; for it extends and multiplies itself. If you serve some stranger for Christ's sake, that stranger may be incited to serve another, for the same reason.

Do you say, "How shall I find God's work?" Ask Him sincerely to show it to you. Working for the poor is a part of God's work, ministering to the sick, reclaiming the wander-

ing. Teaching those ignorant of Christ, and persuading sinners to believe in Him, is doing a work for God, the importance of which no man can measure. "They that turn many to righteousness" shall shine "as the stars for ever and ever."

Do not say, "I do not know how to do this work: I am not qualified." God can teach you, and fit you, and furnish you liberally for His service. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God; . . . and it shall be given him." Are you weak, and faint-hearted? "He giveth power to the faint; and to them who have no might He increaseth strength."

Perhaps you will say, "I *have* roused myself to Christian activity, and have made vigorous efforts for those about me; praying earnestly, and, as I thought, depending upon God for strength. But I was left to make miserable mistakes and failures: all my efforts seemed misdirected. I either spoke to the wrong person, or said and did the wrong thing. I thought that I had done more harm than

good; and I was nearly crushed with discouragement, and felt as if God had laid me aside, and would not allow me the privilege of accomplishing any thing for Him."

God lets us fail sometimes, to show us our dependence upon Him. I shall never forget the counsel of an aged minister to a young beginner in the Christian life: "My daughter, remember God hasn't a child on earth, who can stand alone." Submission is the first lesson, — "Thy will be done," *for* us, and *with* us, and *in* us, and *through* us,— the first lesson, and the last. "Teach me to do Thy will!" we pray, and perhaps our very discouragements and seeming failures are a part of God's answer to our prayer. We are thus emptied of self-confidence, humbled with self-distrust, self-contempt, and the bitterest of all pains, self-reproach; and we lie with our faces in the dust. Then we are weak, that we may be made strong, through Him whose "strength is made perfect in weakness;" we are humbled, that we may be exalted to this

highest privilege of being able to help others heavenward.

> "God doth with us as men with torches do,
> Not light them for themselves."

The torch shines by burning. If we can imagine a torch to be sentient, it would seem as if all glory in its brightness or usefulness must be prevented by the pain of burning. So it may be with the Christian: so, and not otherwise, may our light shine. We are to present our bodies a living sacrifice, to do or suffer the will of God: even if they be consumed upon His altar, it is but our reasonable service.

It may seem a low motive to Christian usefulness, that there is no better tonic for our own weakness, no surer means of spiritual growth. We may be certain, however, that nothing can lift us from our depths of sorrow, and divert us from our lasting, settled grief, but high aims and purposes, which shall engage all our best energies. It is true, as Robert Browning tells us:—

"Man's work is to labor, and leaven,
As best he may, earth here with heaven.
'Tis work for work's sake that he's needing.
Let him work on, as if speeding
Work's end, but not dream of succeeding;
Because if success were intended,
Why, heaven would begin ere earth ended."

But heaven *does* begin before earth ends, to the soul filled with the love of Christ and absorbed in His work. And God *promises* success. "He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."[1] What a comfort to the desolate heart are those words, "*the household of faith*"! We are not alone: we are members of a great family, in heaven and earth; we have a home, indestructible, though earthly dwellings crumble into ruins. And our work shall be its own reward.

[1] Galatians vi. 8–10.

"Thy love shall chant itself its own beatitudes,
After its own life-working. A child's kiss
Set on thy sighing lips shall make thee glad;
A poor man served by thee shall make thee rich;
A sick man helped by thee shall make thee strong:
Thou shalt be served thyself by every sense
Of service which thou renderest." [1]

Let us give ourselves to the work of the Lord with no half-heartedness, but with a whole-souled enthusiasm, that shall make any, even the lowliest, service for Christ a privilege and a delight. We may see no fruit of our efforts. The seed sown may not even blossom till we are in the dust; but our service will be gratefully accepted by Christ, if fragrant with love, as was the precious ointment poured upon His feet. His voice may whisper to us alone, She "hath not ceased to kiss my feet." "She loved much."

God has taught us in the school of sorrow. He has comforted us, that we may know how to comfort others. He has freely given to us, that we may freely give.

[1] Mrs. Browning.

He has supplied our wants, and appeared for our relief in times of trouble and perplexity, — in the very extremity of need, — that our faith might be strong, and that others might be led to trust Him. Let us use, in His service, all the powers He has given, and developed, and purified, fitting us as instruments in the furnace of affliction. Has He trusted us with riches? Let them be freely poured out upon His altar. "Charge them that are rich," says Saint Paul, "that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate," or, as the margin has it, "sociable." [1] Shut not yourselves up in your sorrow: make life happy for others! Bring those that are poor and cast out to your house! Give such feasts as Jesus enjoined, inviting "the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind." [2] Distribute to the necessities of the saints; be given to hospitality!

Are we poor? If "rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom," how much have we to im-

[1] 1 Timothy vi. 17, 18. [2] Luke xiv. 13, 14.

part to others! We can lead them to Him whom we have tried and proved, as our Father and Guide, our Portion, our Refuge, our Redeemer, our Comforter in grief, our Judge in oppression, our loving Master, to whom our adoring hearts offer their all. Blessed were those women, healed by Christ, who followed Him, and ministered to Him of their substance; but we also may minister to Him, in the person of His poor. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."[1]

Earth knows no higher joy than faithful ministry; and, in that brighter world to which we hasten, those who have "come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," are "before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst

[1] Matthew xxv. 40.

any more ; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

" For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters : and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

"The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

"SINCE service is the highest lot,
And all are in one body bound,
In all the world the place is not
Which may not with this bliss be crowned.

The sufferer on the bed of pain
Need not be laid aside from this;
But for each kindness gives again
This "joy of doing kindnesses."

The poorest may enrich this feast:
Not one lives only to receive,
But renders through the hands of Christ
Richer returns than man can give.

The little child, in trustful glee
With love and gladness brimming o'er,
Many a cup of ministry
May for the weary veteran pour.

The lonely glory of a throne
May yet this lowly joy preserve:
Love may make that a stepping-stone,
And change "I reign" into "I serve."

This, by the ministries of prayer,
The loneliest life with blessings crowds,
Can consecrate each petty care,
Make angels' ladders out of clouds.

Nor serve we only when we gird
Ourselves for special ministry:
That creature best has ministered
Which is what it was meant to be.

Birds by being glad their Maker bless;
By simply shining, sun and star;
And we, whose law is love, serve less
By what we do than what we are.

Since service is the highest lot,
And angels know no higher bliss,
Then with what good her cup is fraught,
Who was created but for this."

MRS. CHARLES.

XI.

WIDOWS INDEED.

"Is any among you afflicted? let him pray." — JAMES v. 13.

"Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer." — ROMANS xii. 12.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." — EPHESIANS vi. 18.

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." — PHILIPPIANS iv. 6, 7.

"Pray without ceasing.'

"UNTIRED is He in mercy's task,
Then tire not thou to ask.
He says not: 'Yesterday I gave,
Wilt thou for ever crave?'
He every moment waits to give:
Watch thou unwearied to receive.
Thine hours of prayer, upon the cross
To Him, were hours of woe and shame and loss;
Scourging at morn; at noon pierced hands and feet;
At eve fierce pains of death, for thee He counted sweet.

The blue sky o'er the green earth bends,
At night the dew descends;
The green earth to the blue heaven's ray
Its bosom spreads all day;
Earth answers heaven, — the holy race
Should answer His unfailing grace.

Then smile, low world, in spite or scorn,
We to our God will kneel in prime of morn;
The third, the sixth, the ninth, each Passion hour,
We with high praise will keep, as He with gifts of power."

KEBLE.

"PRAY for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me, night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

TENNYSON.

XI.

"HONOR widows," says St. Paul, "that are widows indeed." He goes on to describe such an one. "Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day."

This order of aged and desolate widows, though at first distinct from the deaconesses, included those whose lives had been spent in faithful ministry. "Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work." [1]

Those who had children and nephews were to be supported by them, that they might

[1] 1 Timothy v. 10.

learn to "show piety at home, and to requite their parents;" and if any man or woman that believed had widows depending upon them, "let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed."

They were not to be admitted into the order under threescore years of age: "The younger widows refuse," "I will that the younger women marry," said the apostle, in his wisdom. (The Epistles to Timothy were written some seven years later than the first Epistle to the Corinthians.)

Without natural supporters, too aged and feeble for the ordinary employments of women, and laid aside in great measure from their benevolent work, these "widows indeed" were, like Anna in the temple, set apart to the service of God in prayer.

Such widows were to be *honored* in the Church. There was little honor or consideration for widows, or for woman, in any heathen nation. Her position was higher among the

Jews than among the Greeks and Romans, and far better than in any Eastern nation; but even with the Jews great liberty of divorce was allowed, and a low standard of morality prevailed. "The true import of marriage," says Neander, "was realized by Christianity; the equal worth and dignity of the female sex, as possessing a nature created in the image of God, and allied to the Divine, no less than the male, was brought before the consciousness, and the sex invested with the rights belonging to it; in opposition to ancient Eastern custom, where the woman was placed in altogether subordinate relation to man." He quotes a passage from Tertullian, on the marriage of believers: —

"What a union is that between two believers, having in common one hope, one desire, one order of life, one service of the Lord! Both, like brother and sister, undivided in spirit or body, may, in the true sense twain in one flesh, kneel, pray, and fast together, mutually teach, exhort, and bear with each

other; they are not separated in the Church of God and at the Lord's Supper; they share each other's troubles, persecutions, joys; neither has any thing to hide from the other; neither avoids the other; there is free liberty to visit the sick, to sustain the needy; the harmony of psalms and hymns goes up between them, and each vies with the other in singing the praises of their God."

This description, of which we quote but a portion, shows that uniting in spiritual songs and the reading of Scripture was the daily custom in Christian families. Clement recommends the same as daily morning employment. The Christians, in general, fell in with the Jewish seasons of prayer, — the third, sixth, and ninth hours of the day (at 9 A.M., 12 M., and 3 P.M.).[1]

[1] "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and He shall hear my voice,"[2] says the Psalmist. Daniel prayed three times a day, with his windows open toward Jerusalem.[3] The disciples were gathered, on the day of Pentecost, "with one accord in one place," at the

[2] Psalm lv. 17. [3] Daniel vi. 10.

Anna, abiding in the temple, "served" or worshipped God with *fasting* as well as prayer. Jewish observances were more rigorous than those of the early Christians, who enjoyed the liberty which Christ gave His disciples, and believed, with Saint Paul, that the kingdom of God consisted "not in meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Hermas (a writer much esteemed in the first centuries), in his "Shepherd," a pastoral epistle, gives advice with reference to fasting which recalls the passage in Isaiah lviii. 6, 7.

"Above all, exercise thy abstinence in this, to refrain both from speaking and hearing what is wrong; and cleanse thy heart from all pollution, from all revengeful feelings,

third hour; Peter and John went into the temple "at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour;" and Peter, at Joppa, "went up upon the house-top to pray, about the sixth hour;" while the vision of Cornelius was "about the ninth hour of the day." [1]

[1] Acts ii. 1, 2, 15, and iii. 1, and x. 3, 9.

from all covetousness; and, on the day thou fastest, content thyself with bread, vegetables, and water, and thank God for these. But reckon up what thy meal on this day would have cost thee, and give the amount to some widow or orphan, or to the poor.' Clement of Alexandria notices the fact that many kinds of pagan worship required celibacy and abstinence from meat and wine in their priests; that there were rigid ascetics among the Indians; and hence argued that usages which existed in other religions and combined with degrading superstitions could not, in themselves, be peculiarly Christian. "As humility is shown not by castigation of the body, but by gentleness of disposition, so also abstinence is a virtue of the soul, consisting not in that which is without, but in that which is within the man."

"When the Montanists would have imposed new fasts and laws of abstinence on the Church, the spirit of evangelical freedom among the Christians took strong ground against them.

All should be free, — act without restraint, — according to their peculiar temperament and individual necessities." [1]

"She that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day;" but nothing is said of her *fasting*.

The expression "night and day," used here and elsewhere,[2] denotes constant and habitual prayer.

"Men ought *always* to pray, and not to faint." "*Watch* unto prayer." "Pray without ceasing." "Continuing instant [or persevering] in prayer."

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

Must one's whole time be spent, then, in the offering of prayer to God? and can only those, who, like Anna and the aged widows,

[1] Neander.

[2] Acts xxvi. 7 and 1 Thessalonians iii. 10.

are laid aside from the active employments of life, fully obey these precepts? Let the Fathers speak to us again.

"He prays without ceasing," says Origen, "who suitably unites prayer with action; for active duty is an integrant part of prayer, since it would be impossible to understand the words of the apostle in any practicable sense, unless we represented to ourselves the whole life of the believer as one entire and connected prayer, of which prayer commonly so called forms but a part." In his exposition of the Lord's Prayer, he says also, "If we duly understand what is meant by praying without ceasing, our whole life must express, Our Father who art in Heaven."

Clement says: "Prayer, if I may speak so boldly, is intercourse with God. Although we do but lisp, although we address God without opening the lips, in silence we cry to Him in the inward recesses of the heart; for, when the whole direction of the inmost soul is to Him, God always hears."

The words translated "prayer" and "supplication" mean, respectively, "worship" and "entreaty." Both are enjoined, and "trusting in God" does not prevent either. "Be careful for nothing," says Saint Paul to the Philippians, — that is, Be not faint-hearted nor anxious: *trust;* "but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." [1]

"Always," and "in every thing," — not only in the season of difficulty, — the true Christian knows his need of help *in every thing*, and seeks it. Our desires are to be "made known unto God," though He knows them already. "The *expression* of our desires has a purifying effect: it strips them of what is selfish." Not only "by prayer and supplication," but "with thanksgiving," are our requests to be offered. The very act of thanksgiving often raises us from despondency, and renews our confidence in God. "This is my infirmity," said the Psalmist, in a season of depression; "but I

[1] Philippians iv. 6.

will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord : surely I will remember thy wonders of old."[1] "Thou which hast shewed me great and sore troubles shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth." "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever : with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations."

And the very words of his thanksgiving have been uttered by generations of rejoicing believers ever since.

Thus, trusting and worshipping, with supplication and thankfulness, the "peace of God" — the rest and repose which come from faith, and the blessing which fills the soul — "shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

We should rejoice in the privilege of serving God by prayer, because "the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man *availeth much*." We remember the prayers of Abraham and Jacob

[1] Psalm lxxvii. 10, 11.

and Moses ; of Hannah, — "For this child I prayed, and the Lord has given me my petition ;" of Elijah and Elisha, and David and Hezekiah, and the prophets, — the earnestness and persistence which seemed to *compel* blessings from on high.

How may we offer such persevering and effectual prayer ? We are told, sometimes, we may be sure our prayers will be answered, if they are offered in accordance with the will of God ; and we think that means that we must have a spirit of submission, since we cannot know what is His will for us, or whether what we ask would be best. This is true ; but there is such a thing as *earnestly working with God's will,* as well as patiently submitting to it.

Do you remember how Luther prayed Melanchthon back to life, when he was "already speechless and insensible, with his countenance apparently fixed in death." Turning to the window, he poured out fervent prayers. "Our Lord God," said Luther, afterwards,

"must needs have heard me; for I brought to His remembrance all the promises about hearing prayer that I could repeat from the Scriptures: so that He must needs hear me, if I were to trust His promises." Thereupon, he took Melanchthon by the hand, and said: "Be of good courage, Philip, thou shalt not die."

Melanchthon having revived enough to express his wish not to be called back to earth, Luther replied, "Ah, my Philip, thou must serve our Lord yet longer here;" and, fetching some food, he forced the unwilling Melanchthon to take it, with the threat, "Thou must swallow it, or I will speak the ban over thee." Melanchthon, after his recovery, declared that he could truly say that he had been called back from death to life, and, if Luther had not come, he must have died.

This is one instance out of many of Luther's strong faith in the power of prayer. He said once, as Mathesuis tells us, "I have prayed our Philip and my Kate and Master Myconius out of the jaws of death."

In the Table Talk, he says: "No one believes how effectual and mighty is prayer, and how much it can bring to pass, but he who has learned by experience, and proved it himself. This I know, that so often as I have prayed fervently, with utter earnestness, I have been richly heard, and have received more than I asked. God has indeed sometimes tarried; but He has come, notwithstanding."

Remember those who were healed by Christ *because of the faith of friends.* Jesus, *seeing their faith* who brought him, said to the sick of the palsy, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," and afterwards, "Rise up and walk."[1] So the centurion's servant was healed, and the Syrophœnician woman obtained the restoration of her daughter from the power of evil spirits. In both cases, Christ commends their faith, which led to their earnest prayers. It does not appear that any demoniac applied personally for healing, or that he could have been in a condition to exercise faith for himself. But

[1] Luke v. 23.

wherever Jesus went, "they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and He healed them." He gave this power to His disciples: "Heal the sick, . . . cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give;"[1] and they returned with joy, saying, "Even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name."

In Jerusalem, after the feast of Pentecost, "they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them;" and "there came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits; and *they were healed every one.*"[2] So when Philip went to Samaria, and preached Christ unto the people, "unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with

[1] Matthew x. 8. [2] Acts v. 15, 16, and viii. 7, 8.

them ; and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city."

"The prayer of faith shall save the sick," says Saint James, "and the Lord shall raise him up ; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed."

The age of miracles is past, we say ; and we look not without suspicion even at well-attested cases of healing, in answer to prayer. But, perhaps, if all who have proved the Lord's faithfulness to His promise could speak, we should be astonished to know how many lives have been saved through the strong, persistent prayer and effort of their best-beloved friends.

If we were to suggest a *physical theory* of the power of prayer in restoring the sick, it would be the magnetic influence of a strong will, especially when its power was upheld by a mighty faith. Luther felt that his will was one with God's, or he would not have dared

to pray as he did. He put God's promises to the test, and his holy boldness seems justified by the result. "Nothing is impossible to him who wills," says Carlyle. "We do not yield us to the evil angels, nor to death utterly, but only through the weakness of our feeble wills."

But if we deem it inconsistent with a spirit of submission to exercise such will-power, such fervency of entreaty, for temporal blessings or the recovery of the sick, there can be no doubt of its rightness with regard to spiritual blessings. It *must* be in accordance with the will of God that those who are led captive by Satan should be released from bondage, that dead souls should live again, that sick and crippled, maimed and paralyzed souls should be restored to health and soundness. Let us have strong, *overcoming* faith to offer importunate, prevailing prayer! "That it may please Thee to strengthen such as do stand, and to comfort and help the weak-hearted, and to raise up those that fall, and

finally to beat down Satan under our feet; we beseech Thee to hear us, Good Lord!"

"The prayer of the Christian," says Tertullian, "draws down no retribution from heaven; but it averts God's anger; it watches for its enemies; it intercedes for the persecutors; it *obtains the forgiveness of sins;* it dispels temptations; it comforts the feeble-minded; it refreshes the strong. Prayer is the bulwark of faith."

"Women received their dead raised to life again." Oh, widowed mothers! have you sons spiritually dead, insensible to the voice of Christ? Pray, and faint not. It may be that, through your faith, they shall be given you, raised to life. How knowest thou, O mother, whether thou shalt save thy son?

It was recently my privilege to enjoy the society of a widow, whose long life of piety had culminated in a most desirable state of mind. She was an example how "tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope."

We had been speaking of a mutual friend, who was unreconciled to the death of her husband. The pain of bereavement was not aggravated by other troubles, for her outward circumstances were unchanged. She lived on, in the same house as before his death, with her affectionate children still around her. She had property, and was self-reliant, and fully competent to manage her own affairs; yet she constantly pined for her husband, was inconsolable, and thought God almost cruel to take him from her. We spoke to her of his great gain, and asked, "Does not the thought of his happiness, as a glorified spirit, comfort you?"

"Oh," said she, "that only reminds me how completely we are separated. He used to depend so much upon *me* for his happiness. He was never contented without me; and to think that I can never, never, be the same to him again!"

We were shocked at the selfishness of this view, and feared her chastening had not

wrought the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and that she would receive still further correction : and so it proved ; for she soon after lost her son. At his death, she said, " I must confess, I have been more anxious that he should be honorable among men than that he should serve God faithfully."

What a confession for a Christian woman to make over the grave of her son !

" But," said Mrs. B., as we recalled this, " I do not think it was all selfishness in her case. She would have been willing that her husband should go to Europe, and be happy without her, had it seemed best for him. The trouble with her is that she does not appreciate the bliss of heaven, and understand that it is but a little time and we shall be reunited, or she would rejoice in his joy. Now heaven seems so transcendently blessed to me, I could not wish my loved ones back to this imperfect life. My husband suffered much from weariness and pain. His was a most laborious ministry, in an uncongenial clime : the very

atmosphere was disheartening, loaded with malaria, and filling one with depression. The mortality in the region was sometimes fearful, and he was in such close sympathy with his people as to make all their griefs his own. A great part of our work was to visit the sick and dying, to comfort mourners, and cheer the despondent and faint-hearted. However deep the snow or keen the wind, they thought no one could be buried without his services, nor married by any other clergyman, let the night be never so dark and stormy. Last winter was very severe, and I often thanked God that my husband was safely sheltered in the heavenly mansions, where there is no more death, nor any more pain, and where all tears are wiped away. I was truly grateful that, after all his self-denying toil, he had been called to enter into his Master's joy. Not that I think of him as idle. You know 'tis said, 'His servants shall serve Him.' That was my husband's delight here: how much more now, where 'the inhabitant shall not

say, I am sick.' He was faithful over a few things, now he is ruler over many things: his service as much greater and more efficient, as the new development and perfection of his powers."

"You had seen him suffer, year after year," I remarked; "and this helped you to acquiescence in his death."

"No, that was not all which reconciled me. My son was taken suddenly, immediately after commencing his ministry, and my feelings were the same. I always think of them as among the glorified, the cloud of witnesses who beckon us on, and urge us to be true to our high calling. How can I wish them back from their great reward!"

"But for yourself! Do you not pity yourself, and mourn over your loneliness, — your home in the old parsonage broken up, and you so far from the people of your love?"

"Do I not hear Christ saying, 'The time is short; Let those that weep be as though they wept not?' He helps me to forget myself in my interest for others."

"Have you no anxiety, no fear for the future?"

"Not the slightest. Why should I distrust my Shepherd, my loving Friend, my Father? Would you have the child, for whom you have done the most, lose confidence in your loving care and in your expressed promises? Nothing that my Father in heaven appoints can harm me. Outward circumstances matter little. Life consists not in the abundance of things possessed. Worldly good is worthless, compared with the peace Christ gives, and the joy which those possess who abide in Him. I can sometimes fully respond to the quotation you read me from Mrs. P.'s poems.

'But Thou, who, taking much, so much hast given,
Hast granted me the very peace of Heaven.
My God! Thine eye, omniscient and divine,
Rests on no calmer, happier heart than mine:
Empty of all things else, what room for Thee,
Who hast been, art, and wilt be All to me!'

"My four sons are all young ministers," she continued. "They are poor; and I am

entirely satisfied that it should be so. The youngest of them preached his first sermon last Sabbath ; when I told him I would rather hear such words from him, and know that he was helping others toward heaven, than to see him a millionnaire.

"My prayer, from their birth, has always been, that they might labor for Christ, even if but in some dark corner of the earth." Then she added, "My most ardent desire now is to help some one, no matter how humble, in the Divine life.

"I do not expect to do more than a few little things ; but I am daily and hourly watching for that small and obscure work, for which alone I feel fitted."

> "*Thy* lodging is in childlike hearts,
> Thou makest there Thy nest."

If all widows could gain this state of mind, what an army of true workers would there be for the Church ! Doubtless, all might thus come up from the wilderness, "leaning on the Beloved."

Do we not hear our Lord saying, "Thou shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more, for thy Maker is thine husband: the Lord of Hosts is His name?"

"Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you."

"That ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, *that we should bring forth fruit unto God.*"

"In the night, Thy song shall be with me."

"O COMFORTER of God's redeemed,
Whom the world does not see,
What hand should pluck me from the flood
That casts my soul on Thee?
Who would not suffer pain like mine
To be consoled like me?

When I am feeble as a child,
And flesh and heart give way,
Then on Thy everlasting strength
With passive trust I stay,
And the rough wind becomes a song,
The darkness shines like day.

Oh, blessed are the eyes that see,
Though silent anguish show
The love that in their hours of sleep
Unthanked may come and go;
And blessed are the ears that hear,
Though kept awake by woe.

Happy are they that learn, in Thee,
Though patient suffering teach,
The secret of enduring strength,
And praise too deep for speech,—
Peace that no pressure from without,
No strife within, can reach.

My heart is fixed, O God my strength,
My heart is strong to bear ;
I will be joyful in Thy love,
And peaceful in Thy care.
Deal with me, for the Saviour's sake,
According to His prayer !

Deep unto deep may call, but I
With peaceful heart will say, —
Thy loving kindness hath a charge
No waves can take away ;
And let the storm that speeds me home
Deal with me as it may."

MISS A. L. WARING.

"We which have believed do enter into rest."

"For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works.

"Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest." — HEBREWS iv. 3, 10, 11.

"O rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him." — PSALM xxxvii. 7.

"And therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him.

"Thou shalt weep no more: He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when He shall hear it, He will answer thee." — ISAIAH xxx. 18, 19.

"And the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces." — ISAIAH xxv. 8.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee." — ISAIAH xxvi. 3.

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